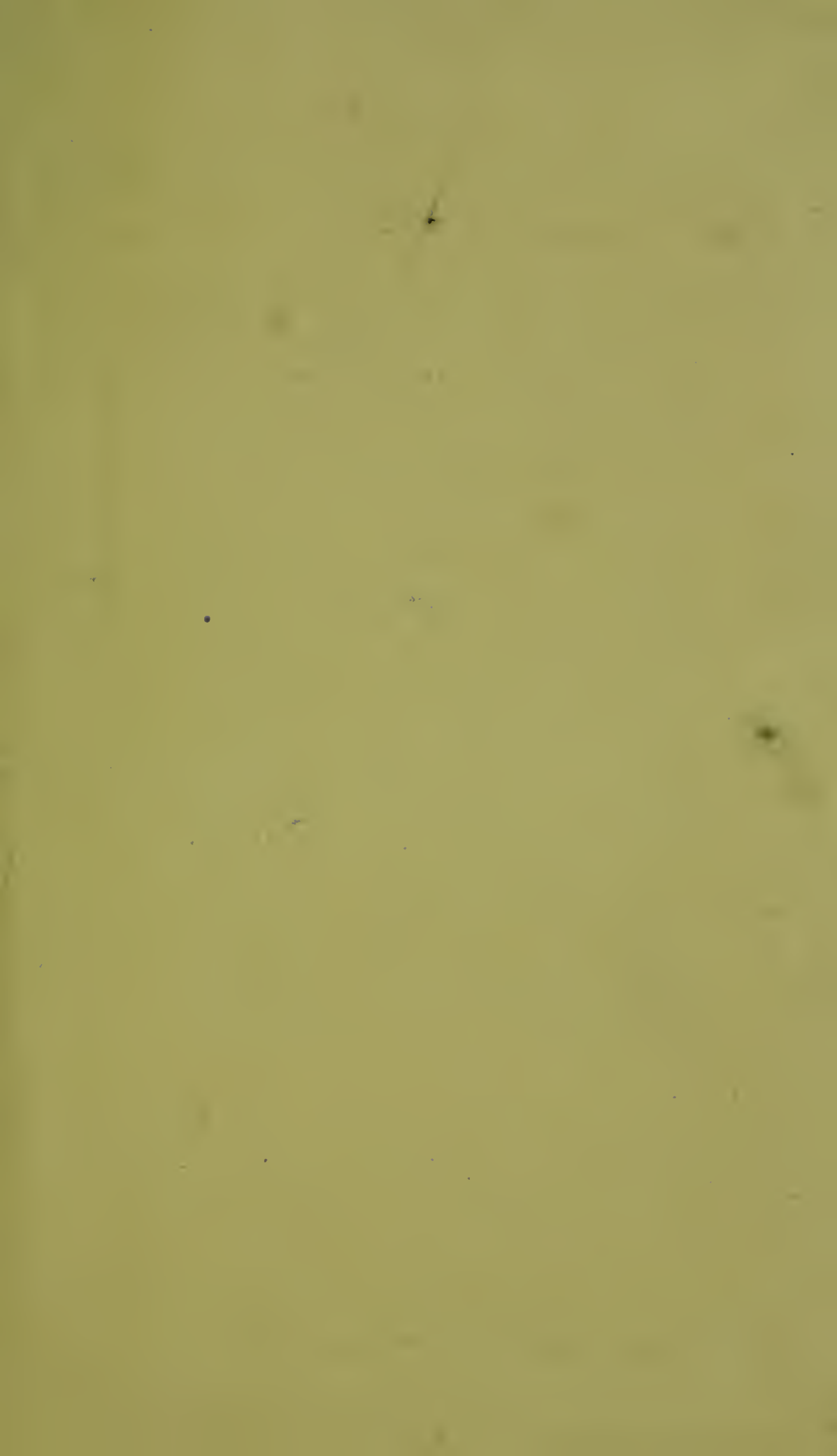


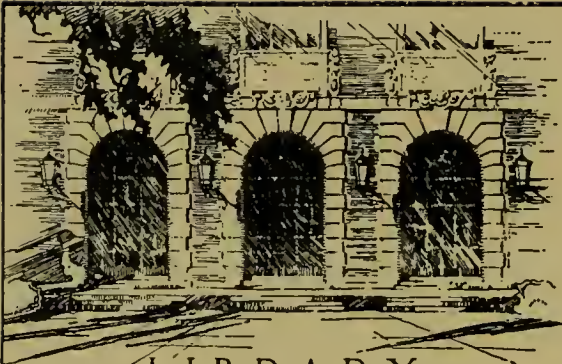


Post. C. 10

---

38





LIBRARY  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF ILLINOIS

823  
G8694d  
v. 1



# DR SINCLAIR'S SISTER

BY

EDWARD GREY

*(Author of "Concealed for Thirty Years")*

*IN THREE VOLS*

VOL I

LONDON

EDEN, REMINGTON & CO PUBLISHERS  
15 KING STREET COVENT GARDEN

---

1891

[All Rights Reserved]



823

G 8694 d

V. 1

## CONTENTS.

| CHAP.                                | PAGE |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| I. Disinherited ... ..               | 1    |
| II. After Seven Years ... ..         | 20   |
| III. The Changed Name ... ..         | 33   |
| IV. Abbeyslea's Monitor ... ..       | 50   |
| V. Franz Humbert ... ..              | 71   |
| VI. Her Idol ... ..                  | 89   |
| VII. The Great "Bairn-Lover" ... ..  | 111  |
| VIII. The Child and the Music ... .. | 130  |
| IX. Lambert Islay ... ..             | 149  |
| X. A Stormy Scene ... ..             | 166  |
| XI. Suspicions ... ..                | 187  |
| XII. Taken to Task ... ..            | 209  |
| XIII. The Children's Garden ... ..   | 231  |
| XIV. Mrs. Forrester ... ..           | 255  |
| XV. "Are you not too Proud?" ... ..  | 276  |
| XVI. A Stranger ... ..               | 297  |
| XVII. At Bay ... ..                  | 320  |

27 Oct. 53. Mark

Gen Res Ray 27 Aug 53 Joseph = 34.



## CHAPTER I.

### DISINHERITED.

“ THEN, you intend going against my wishes?”

“ Yes.”

“ You mean deliberately to cut yourself off from me and your family, in order that you may follow your own senseless will, and lower yourself and me in standing behind an apothecary’s counter?”

“ No.”

“ May I ask what then are your designs? Possibly you have been seized by some new brilliant idea, as disagreeable to me and as delightful to yourself as was the first one. Pray propound it. Your sisters and cousin are awaiting with interest, I assure you. They like listening to our amiable discussions; it whets their appetites and gives flavour to their conversations. And I, also,

experience feelings of great pleasure, when I hear my son and heir inspired with the wish to follow the noble professions of feeling cloths, or tasting teas, or selling drugs—bah!”

The cool, contemptuous tones of the speaker ceased as, with an exclamation of disgust, he leaned back in his chair and half-closed his eyes. He was a small, thin, elderly man of about sixty years, with a low, slanting forehead and thin-cut lips, that seemed to close in and almost disappear as he articulated rapidly his words.

The room was a large and luxurious one, with handsome furniture and elegant draperies. It was lighted by lamps suspended from the delicately-coloured ceiling, and by a large fire that burnt brightly in the open grate.

Standing on the left side of the hearth, with one elbow leaning on the high marble mantelpiece, was a young man of apparently twenty-three or twenty-four years. He had remained motionless, with his face half-buried in his hand, while his father had thus bitterly questioned him; only rousing himself slightly as he gave his monosyllabic answers.

There were three other occupants of the room :—a fair, pale lady with restless, light-coloured eyes that shot quick glances every now and again from father to son ; a child, with dark-hanging, heavy hair, and awkward hands, engaged in some plain needlework that seemed to require careful attention, for her head was bent down low over it ; and a man of about thirty, lounging back in a large arm-chair, reading a newspaper, which he occasionally rustled impatiently.

The small clock on the mantelpiece ticked loudly and jarringly, during the long pause that ensued, after the elderly man's satirical outburst.

At length the fair, pale lady spoke.

"Marc, why do you not answer your father ? If you have changed your mind and mean to go in for the law, as he wishes you, why cannot you say so, and thus end all these discussions. And if not,—well—you are of age, and can cut out your own line of life for yourself, and I suppose father can scarcely put any other impediment in your way than that of his displeasure."

Her voice was high-toned and clear ; her



face, with its well-carved features, hard and cold-looking.

James Islay looked up sharply, with his keen eyes gleaming. A heavy stick leant against his chair; he seized it and brought it down with a heavy thud on the floor.

“*Except* my displeasure, indeed, Beatrice,” said he, in derisive tones. “You think *that* will be but small obstruction put in Marcus’s way if he refuse to enter the profession, that I and my father and my father’s father have prospered in. A small obstruction—yes—yes!”

He laughed ironically.

“What do you say, Lambert?” he continued, turning his head slightly to one side, and looking at the fair man holding the newspaper. “You know the history of our family a few generations back as well as I do, and an Islay’s displeasure has never proved a light matter, has it? Aye?”

“Ah! no—scarcely um—a light matter,” replied his nephew, Lambert Islay, speaking in a tenor, drawling voice, “but still um—we live in more enlightened ages—aw now, and anger doesn’t—um aw—go down in the same way as —”



“Tut! tut! man!” broke in his uncle, angrily, “more enlightened ages, indeed! Think that makes any difference to me, or Marcus either? No.”

He turned impatiently from his nephew and looked at the tall, leaning figure near the mantelpiece. As he did so his keen face became darker, and his thin lips drew into a long, narrow line.

“Marcus, I require your answer now, without any more delay. Don’t stand there looking like a fool, though genius, such as yours, doubtless, must be shown in certain attitudes. Speak out and say whether you mean to comply with my wishes, and make the law your profession or no. I am not in the humour to be trifled with, and I have waited long enough for your decision.”

Slowly Marcus Islay raised his head from his hand, and, drawing himself up, moved a step nearer his father.

He had a strange, dark face, almost southern-looking in its colouring. The features were irregular, but strongly marked. The eyes were large and gloomy, set deep beneath thick, rather arched eyebrows. The mouth was peculiar, the lower lip protruding

slightly and giving the whole face a look of protest and dissatisfaction. The forehead was high, the chin square, and the hair thick, and nearly black in colour. It was a cloudy, sunless face, more that of a dreamer than of a man of the world, and entirely unlike in expression or outline either the faces of his father, or elder sister.

As he moved forward he glanced at the little girl with the heavy, dark hair; and, as if feeling his gaze resting on her, she raised her head quickly, and their eyes met. For one moment a soft smile lit the young man's countenance, but as he turned from her it passed into a sharp, convulsive look of pain. The face of the girl was that of a child of scarcely more than thirteen or fourteen years; it was an eager, earnest face, with a half-frightened expression upon it. She looked at her brother silently with clouded eyes; then, as he turned from her, she lowered her head again, and two great tears splashed heavily down on the hands that lay on her lap, locked tightly together.

"Father," began Marcus Islay, with a certain dogged determination in his voice,

that made the elder man's eyes glitter fiercely, as he looked at him with mock patience, "I cannot and will not enter the law,—I hate it and everything connected with it. Is there no other line in life, that you offer me—nothing else that—"

"Nothing, there is no alternative. I have one wish, and that wish you shall follow out, or else—"

James Islay stopped short, and laughed a hard, grating laugh.

"You are unjust, unfair," exclaimed his son in deep, angry tones, while a hot flush rose to his brow. "Why should you thus force me to do what I hate? Why do you drive me and badger me, as if I were a mere senseless boy, with no mind of my own, and no desires or inclinations? Am I a bit of wood or stone that you would *hammer* me into the shape and into the thing that you would have me be? Why are you no father to me, only a hard, relentless man, who loves to scorn me, and probe to the quick, because I cannot blindly follow in your wake? I say I *cannot*, for it is not that I will not; I have tried, but to no

purpose,—everything and all that you want, is more repugnant to me each time I think of it. I tell you, I *cannot* do as you wish.”

He paused breathlessly, for the words had fallen from his lips in quick, passionate tones. Every nerve and fibre of his body was strung up with painful tension.

While he was speaking his father had leant back in his chair, with a half-cynical look; but, as he finished, a shadow, dark and grim, crept over his face, which seemed strangely to contract each feature. With a spasmodic movement he rose from his seat and stood confronting his son.

“You have said your say. I now will say mine, and I call Beatrice,—Lambert,—Claire, to witness what I do say.”

He stopped a moment and looked around.

The fair woman's face grew a shade paler, and her restless, light eyes seemed mesmerized upon her father. The child's head sank down lower and lower on her breast till her face was hidden by her heavy, dark hair. And Lambert Islay slowly laid aside his paper, and gazed into the fire. There was an odd expression on his fair, handsome face



which baffled all analysis. It seemed to lend a certain look of triumph to his eyes, though at the same time his lip was slightly curled with apparent disdain. No one could have told to which side he lent his feeling, or, rather, interest, for his face was one of those which was expressive of a mind that lent cool, calculating interest—not of a heart that gave deep, genuine feeling.

“Listen to what I have now to say,” continued James Islay, still looking away from his son, and speaking in distinct, clear tones, which seemed to cut as a knife in their pungency. “My son, Marcus, is no longer a son to me,—he is disinherited, and this night he goes from his home for ever. I will not see him again, not though he may come here and beg at my very doors. He is less to me than my lowest dependent—he is nothing—*nothing*.”

With bitter emphasis he repeated the word, and then drew a step back.

He looked at the gloomy dark face before him with the flush of wrath upon it, and with every muscle working convulsively. But it did not move him. He had been

thwarted and withstood; his will had been put aside and his authority set at nought. The piece of human nature that he had tried to hammer into the likeness of his own, had refused to be struck. The will that was to have crouched impotently beneath his, had risen and asserted its freedom. Nevertheless, it should feel the burden of his displeasure; it should suffer for its liberty; it should sink low for its impolitic folly.

“This night you go from my doors never to return,” he said, his hard measured voice trembling with suppressed ire, “but before you go you shall listen once more to what you, in your witless infatuation, are casting away. I have offered you a berth such as few fathers can place ready for their sons, and you have refused it. I have told you that it would only mean close and sharp work for thirty years or less, and then if you wished you could retire with an income that would make the world envy you; and you, like a fool, have snapped your fingers at it and replied that all this is nothing to you. I have given you an education, the best and most complete that any son could

have had, and I have lived to regret it,—yes, to regret it, for if I had but forced you into office work, when a boy of fifteen, I should not now be hearing you insist upon following out your mere whims, and find you filling your head with lofty notions of mixing chemicals and preparing poisons. Why don't you go into a shop or counting-house at once? Why don't you try a curate's pay, or a Congregational minister's? Why not aim at being a farmer, or bailiff, or something equally select and respectable? Or if that fails, I believe a professor of music or arts, can manage to scrape along upon his scanty £1 a week. Try them all now if you choose; it is nothing to me,—less than nothing. Only don't drag my name down with you,—you have no right to it—you have forfeited it,—as you leave this house to-night you cease to be an Islay. Take your second name—your dead mother's maiden name, if it please you,—take that and the miserable £100 a year she insisted upon making over to you at her death, against my will. Take it as your ill-deserved portion—you won't have a penny from me—no, not a

sou to help you start,—you shall suffer, pinch, die, and it will be nothing to me. Go,—I have said my say. Go,—the hour stands at eight now, and by ten the doors will be closed upon you for ever. Leave this room,—the sight of you is hateful to me.”

James Islay's tones had risen, till they seemed to ring through the room and sting the air with their bitter wrath.

The face of Marcus Islay was white as marble, and locked and still as death. He stood for a moment after those last words were uttered and gazed as one in a dream, first at his father, then slowly his eyes travelled to his cousin and Beatrice, and then, last, rested on his little dark-haired sister.

“ Claire ! ”

He formed the name with his lips, but it was heard only like a low groan, while he staggered from the room.

As the door closed the child's self-control gave way, and she broke into a storm of passionate weeping.

“ Father, father, don't send him away, don't—don't.”

She had left her chair, and was standing



with one hand clutching at her father's sleeve, and with her face upturned to his in piteous entreaty.

The fear and awe that she had of him was forgotten and swallowed up, in the dark terror of dread she had, that her brother would be sent away from her for ever,—the brother in whom her whole child's soul was wrapped. But she looked into the angry man's eyes and saw there no relenting; his face was as hard as adamant.

“Father,” she pleaded again, with trembling lips, “don't send him away. I shall die if he goes. He is so good, and so brave, and so beautiful, only nobody loves him, except me, nobody—nobody. Father, let me call him back.”

There was no answer.

A darker panic seized her. Marcus would be going, was going, perhaps was *gone*, and still there was no word said that would bring him back.

Her face grew whiter, and her eyes dilated wide with fear. She looked at her sister, but saw no sympathy, no help, in her cold, fair face.

The cloud lowered.

“You won’t call him back?—you won’t?—you *won’t*?” she cried, unclasping her hands from her father’s arm, and dragging herself slowly away, “then,—then, let me go with him, let me—”

“Send the child to bed, Beatrice; you should have seen to it before. She is as excitable as her mother was, and ought to be kept in check. It is quite time for her to be sent to a strict school.”

Beatrice opened her lips to speak, but the child was already gone.

Fair, pale woman! Had she laid a lump of ice on her heart and frozen it? Had she clasped an iron band round the soul within her, so that it might not respond to those other souls, with whom it should have held closest communion? Did she know that a child’s nature is soft, pliable, tender, and that it is blighted by even a cold look? Did she feel verily guilty concerning her brother, in that, in his extremest need, she had given him none of the sympathy he sought; she had spoken no low word of sisterly counsel and love? Who knows? A statue could

not have revealed less than did the face of Beatrice Islay, as silently she worked on.

It was winter time, and the night was stormy. Gusts of wind swept round the house, and moaned mournfully outside the windows. There were lulls now and again, when the sound of heavy rain could be heard coming down in short, sharp showers. It was an inclement night, and all who could would be gathered round their household fires, and would pity those obliged, from duty, to go out and face the elements.

Upstairs, in a room far removed from the rest by a long passage, the wind seemed to sob more drearily, and the rain to beat against the window panes with more drenching force. Perhaps it may have been that there the tempest was catching up and mingling with its wail and weeping, the sounds of a man's low voice and a child's bitter sobs.

“Promise me, promise me, Marc, you will come back in—in—”

“Listen, Claire, and I will tell you once

more, and you must try and understand, though I know, dear, it is hard for you."

The child's arms were pressed close round the brother's neck, and her face was hidden on his breast.

"You will not see me, my darling, till many years have gone by," he went on, in a low, husky voice, "not till seven long years have passed, and you have grown into a woman, and then —"

"You mean I shall be twenty-one then, and Father can't make me stay at home," broke in the child, a little gleam of light piercing through the darkness, "and so you may come back and take me to live with you,—with you always."

"Yes, dear, but it will be a long, long time to wait. You must not hope to see me even once during all that time, you —"

"O, Marc, Marc, I can't bear it! I can't let you go, and not see you again, I *can't*!"

"Hush, darling, hush," he said, soothingly, pressing the trembling little form closer to him and trying to stay the heaving sobs, "don't say that, but help me, little sister, help me, Claire, to be brave. . . ."



His voice broke.

Almost fiercely he bowed his head and kissed the child's dark, tear-stained face. By degrees her weeping lessened, then ceased altogether, and there was a long silence.

At length she lifted her face from his breast, and looked closely at him. Something in the expression of his eyes frightened her.

"Marc, what is it? Why do you look like that?" she exclaimed, pressing close to him again. "What do you mean? How—how can I help you to be brave?"

There was a cloud upon his soul dark as night, but, as the child spoke and gazed at him with great, earnest, loving eyes, it gradually lifted, and, instead, a look of strength and purpose stole upon his gloomy, brooding countenance.

"Claire, my darling, you are saving me from myself," he said, laying his hand gently on her dark hair, and looking long and tenderly into her face. "You are my good little angel, helping me to be a true man, and not a coward. If it wasn't for you, dear, I should leave this home to-night, and no one would ever see me or hear of me again."

"Why, Marc?" she questioned, in a scared voice, as she clasped her arms tighter round his neck.

"Never mind, dear, it is all passed now," he answered, in firm tones. "I am going to live and work and struggle up, so that one day I may come and fetch my little Claire to be with me, and make my lonely life happy. O Claire, my little sister, you won't —" Loudly, sonorously the clock outside in the passage struck the quarter to ten.

"Promise me, Claire," he went on, feverishly, his deep voice trembling, as still he hungrily gazed into the mute child's face, so close to his, "promise me you will not change. You will be my little dark-haired darling, with a great, loving heart and wild ways. You won't let the hard; cold world eat into you and harm you. You won't be like Beatrice or any of the others. Oh! promise me, my little sister, that when I see you again after seven long years you will be a loving, tender woman, with a child's pure heart and innocent ways. Promise me, Claire."

Lower and lower he bowed his head, for



there was no sound. The child's face was white, her eyes dull and strained.

"Promise me, Claire," he whispered again, touching her cold cheek with his burning one.

The child's lips moved painfully.

"I promise."

Gently he unclasped the arms that clung round his neck, and then he tenderly kissed the cold, still face, and placed the trembling little form on a low couch.

"Good-bye, my darling. Be brave—be good."

For one moment he knelt and hid his face in his hands. A kind of worldless, despairing prayer was offered up; then he groped his way blindly to the door.

The clock struck ten.

"Marc, Marc, where are you? Come back to me; I can't, *can't* live all that time without you. Come back—come back to me."

The child's desolate cry rang out through the house, long and loud. But there was no answer to it. The front door was already closed, and her brother, Marcus Sinclair Islay, was gone.

## CHAPTER II.

AFTER SEVEN YEARS.

SEVEN long years have passed away, and Marcus Sinclair and his sister, Claire Islay, have met again.

There are some periods in our lives which form great, indelible landmarks, up to which all that came before has been dated, and from which all that comes after is thought of, connected, and chartered. Few lives have so even and smooth a course that, in looking back, none of these landmarks are visible, standing out as great, indicatory points of light or shade, bearing the impress of some perennial joy or sorrow. It is these that keep us young, or make us old; and it is by these that the years which go by should be reckoned.

With Marcus Sinclair (now no longer an Islay) and his sister, the great central epoch of their lives was their reunion. This was

the ray of sunlight which steadily lit the dark horizon of those seven lonely years, and towards which each pressed on with eager anxiety and feverish haste. The light never burnt low, the rift in the clouds never lessened; for the faith each had in the other was fixed, steadfast, immutable. It shone out clear and bright when colossal difficulties seemed to block the way, and rise as great impregnable walls before them. It streamed with lustrous glow right into the gloom of prostration and despair when the heart was sick with repeated failures, and all efforts to rise above adverse circumstances seemed unavailing; and it shed a hallowed beam into those terrible periods of deepest night, when the soul in agony is unable to stretch forward to its God, or to feel His Presence around it.

“Be brave, be good,”—these were the words that sounded in Claire Islay’s heart long after her brother had left,—these, with also the dim remembrance that she had promised him something, which at the time she had scarcely understood.

As she advanced from childhood into girlhood, a little of the meaning of this promise

that she had made, dawned upon her. She trembled at that which was contained in it. What had Marcus asked her to do and to be? Did he know himself, when he had looked so passionately into the child's face, and the wild hope had seized him that the heart and nature of that child could remain the same through the change of passing years? Did he understand that he had asked her to go through the fire of evil and wrong and wickedness that was around her, and to come out from thence with not so much as the hem of her garments singed by the encroaching flames? Did he realize that he was demanding of her a promise, that was *almost* impossible to keep in spirit and in truth? Surely he knew not what he asked, and she, childlike, knew not what she promised,—only she resolved that whatever she thought he would wish her to do, she would do it, because she loved and trusted him.

And thus it was that Claire Islay, although she only half understood her brother's words, still struggled to do and to be, what she thought he must have meant by them.



She was sent to a school after the departure of Marcus—to an establishment where severe discipline was kept, and hard, narrow rules made.

“Send the child to a strict school,” James Islay had said; “she must be kept in check, for she is excitable like her mother,” and so Beatrice, with conscientious care and pains, had selected one.

The principal of this seminary thought that the fresh young natures were placed in her charge to be made into puppets—to have their life, freedom, fancy, individuality knocked out of them. She instructed them well; she understood the art of teaching,—all who left her school were highly informed, and, up to a certain point, well and thoroughly educated. But in many cases she had also spoilt God’s handiwork; she had stunted all natural growth,—she had bruised and crushed the soft hearts and feelings of these mere children, she had nipped and withered the tender shoots and the expanding flowers.

There were, however, some natures amongst the many that refused to be hurt by her care-



ful process. Some that rose up when they were pressed down, and would think their own thoughts, and live in their own fanciful imaginations, and enjoy their own wild humours, and love those special ones round whom their warm, impulsive hearts would cling. And all the discipline and opposition they received seemed to have no effect. Perhaps, indeed, it stimulated rather than stagnated the wild, free life that was within them.

Claire Islay had one of these bright, resilient natures, and the five years she remained at that school did not manifestly change the child's deep, loving heart. She passed into her young womanhood with the promise she had made—as far as it was possible—faithfully kept.

But there were two more years of trial, more severe and more tentative than were these first five years: These were the two that were spent at her home after her education was—so-called—finished.

James Islay was the same hard, bitter father, with his sardonic smile and cutting words. He took a grim kind of pleasure in watching this young, frank spirit, with its

open-hearted ways and quick, free sayings. He liked to curb and probe it. He liked to watch the hot flush mount to the girl's brow, and see the sensitive lips quiver, while he wounded her with arrows poison-tipped, and sought to harden her with his cold, narrow philosophy. She reminded him so forcibly of his wife, whose spirit he had crushed, and whose heart he had broken, and yet the remembrance of whom brought to him no feeling of remorse or compunction.

Beatrice, also, was the same frigid, self-contained woman, with restless, light eyes, and silent, unsympathetic ways. She was thirty-six now, and the stern marks in her forehead were growing deeper, while her pale face was paler than it used to be. She had lived, and was living, a sunless, loveless life, and so the advancing years told upon her, with nothing to soften or hallow them.

It was surrounded by these home influences, that Claire Islay had passed the last two years of her life. She had looked for love and help; but she had found none; everything around her was cramped,

rigid, adamant. She had called out for some sign that life was the beautiful, lofty, mysterious thing that her imagination had pictured it, but she had received no answer. She had striven to rise above the weight that was pressing her down; she had sought to break loose from the cold embrace of she scarcely knew what,—which was wrapping her round. But the trial was too protracted, the probation too severe. Little by little she withdrew into herself. Her laughter became less gay, less frequent—her ways less wild and unrestrained, her words less free, open, artless. She hardly felt the difference in herself, only she knew it was harder than it used to be, to be “good and brave;—” and, though she tried to do as she thought Marcus would wish, she felt that there was somehow a thin shell first to be broken through, before she could do it. Her tender, susceptible nature did not change, her soft heart did not harden; but she drew a veil of reserve over them lest they should be wounded to the quick, and she should lie smarting and undone before those inexorable wills and stony hearts, that were around her.

The religion that she had had as a child, and to which during her schooldays she had tenaciously clung, seemed to die down and burn as the feeblest spark within her soul. She acknowledged a great universal God, but she did not know what it was to seek refuge beneath the Shadow of His Wing—to ask strength and help in the time of temptation and trouble of an All-Wise and All-Loving Father. All the light that she had within her, was the light of her brother's love and her love for him. This was the altar at which she worshipped, and this was the god before whom she bowed.

At length, however, the time of separation had drawn to a close, and the dark past had begun to fade away in the long-hoped-for dawn of a new morning. When James Islay had received a short letter from one, Marcus Sinclair—once known as Marcus Sinclair Islay—stating that if it were still his sister Claire's wish, he should that day come and fetch her away to live with him,—Claire had felt that all that she had lived in and suffered was even at that very moment fading away. It was but a sombre dream of the past, to be



looked into only as a thing gone by, but never to be actually felt or realized again. So, with the wrath and scorn of her father, and with the frigid silence and disapprobation of Beatrice, she had left her home to cast in her lot with her brother.

Thus,—they met again after a seven years' separation.

Marcus Sinclair had developed into a silent, reserved man; grave and almost morose to all outsiders. But he felt his whole nature being stirred to its very depths when, after these long years of waiting and working, his sister, whom, as a child, he had loved with a strange and passionate affection, was once again restored to him.

After the first close embrace had been given, and the first few words had been spoken, he drew her face close to his, and said, in a low, unsteady voice —

“Claire, let me look at you, and see if my little child-sister is again with me. My heart has been starved so long,—let me at last feed it,—let me satisfy its cravings.”

And he looked long at her, with eyes that sought to read her inmost soul.



The child's expressive, eager face had developed into a woman's dark, beautiful face. Yet the features were not faultlessly regular, neither were they striking when in repose. But the large, brown eyes were soft and limpid, and had a great, earnest look about them, as if they were striving to see the real in all that they looked into. They were set with long lashes that curled upwards. Above them, were perfectly level eye-brows, which seemed to give the same true, steadfast look. The forehead was straight and rather low; the mouth was expressive, but, though now parted with intense pleasure, looked as if it were unhappy,—there was a slight droop about it that told of suffering. This look should not have been there. It was a mistake. The whole rounded face, with the clear, deep colouring, would have been bright, happy, girlish-looking, if it had not been for that sadness about the mouth. That look of sadness had not been always there; it had only come during the last two years, when the frank, open nature had shrunk into itself before the probing wounds it had received.

Well for it, perhaps, that it had closed itself in, otherwise, instead of the sadness there, there might have been a hardness or even a bitterness.

Marcus looked deep into the soft, brown eyes, and as he did so the stern lines on his face seemed to relax, and he drew a long breath of pleasure,—of entire satisfaction. He looked at the thick masses of dark hair that surmounted the straight, low brow, and he smiled a quick, happy smile, for he pictured to himself again the child's eager little face, set with the loose-hanging, heavy hair. But as still he looked, he saw the trembling lips, saw that they were marked with a kind of suffering—a sort of reserve,—and over his face there passed a shadow, and into his eyes there stole the old look of gloom and protest. Why had his little child-sister suffered? Why had there been no protecting arm put round her, to guard her from all that would hurt her? Why had he been banished from her when he could and would have sheltered her from all that was sad, or painful, or dark? Why had she not been given back to him as he had left her—wild,

happy, sunny—with no sign to shew that she had been passing through a world of suffering and trial?

Strange, unreasoning man! Yet, how many there are who ask the same questions, and who would have the same impossible answers! How many would have all the child-sisters grow into women with no marks showing that they are living in a hard world, which clutches hold of them roughly and takes from them, almost by force, their innocence and unshaken trust! How many would have them bright, happy, gay, untouched by any darkness or trouble! How many cast blame upon those women who have let lines of care furrow their brows and looks of sadness gloom their eyes! How many think that they would like to look upon them as upon pictures without shade, light without darkness! And yet, how could the women be helps-meet for the men, if they had not passed through and felt the fire of sorrow and suffering and sin? How could they give their true sympathy when their hearts most needed it; real light when their souls tremble in the darkest abyss of night;

highest love when in times of temptation and bitterest trial they stand undone before it?

Ah!—it is not the *knowledge* of evil, it is not the *knowledge* of sin and of suffering that need hurt. It is only when the nature is not true and noble enough, and stoops down and becomes part of the darkness that glooms the world, that that nature must become mortally injured.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE CHANGED NAME.

“MARC, what a beautiful little house this is, and how happy we shall be !”

“Then you won’t mind being poor? You will try not to miss all the luxuries and comforts, to which you have been accustomed, Claire?”

“Miss them, Marc? Why,—I never cared for them. I used to hate being waited on and bothered. I like doing things myself, and I like —”

“Even if you have to stop and consider how to make two ends meet, and whether you can afford this or that?—for it’s not yet all plain sailing, you know, Claire.”

Marcus Sinclair said this with a tinge of bitterness in his voice, for he was a proud man, and he would have liked to have been able to prepare for his sister a larger and more luxuriously furnished home. He would



only have been satisfied if he could have given her the best of everything, and have had her every wish and desire attended to.

It was in the neighbourhood of a fairly well-to-do suburb of the large city of O—, that Marcus Sinclair had found an opening for a medical career. His path had been beset by numerous giant difficulties, which at times had made him stagger in his resolve to work and struggle upward. He had never known what poverty or low water were at his father's house, where the rich lawyer's income had supplied everything with lavish plenty. But when he left that home on that winter's stormy evening, he entered into a new unexplored land, where were high, precipitous hills to climb, and deep waters to ford. He became acquainted with life on its darker side; he tasted of its bitters instead of its sweets; he cast in his lot with the striving majority, instead of with the well-to-do minority. The sudden change was harder to him than it would have been to many men; for, he was sensitive, fanciful, highly refined. He had to stoop and bend his proud head low before many things, that

would scarcely have been felt by others, but which acted as shocks upon his nature. Nameless, poor, without interest or friends, the odds were terribly against him. But he had a fine nature, and he rose above what threatened to crush. He saw a light in the dim future; he remembered a promise that had been given in the past, and so shielding himself in a steel armour, he struggled on. By degrees the profession which, always as a boy, he had had a wish to enter, began to interest and captivate him. He passed through his several examinations with brilliant success, and pressed on hard and fast. Every spare hour he employed in laboured and earnest study, penetrating cautiously yet deeply into the mysteries of the science to which he was devoting himself. And, as the years passed on, young as he was, clever and prosperous physicians began to take note of him. They saw in the dark, silent man, germs of a future greatness.

He was morose and reserved, hating society and society's ways. People who did not know him as a doctor feared and disliked him as a man; still, they learnt to listen to

his well-weighed opinions, and sought him for his careful advice and unerring skill. He became known in Abbeyslea—the neighbourhood where he spent the latter half of the years since leaving his father's house,—and the name he had taken as his surname, began to be spoken highly of and respected. No one knew of his other name. No one guessed the past that had helped to make him so prematurely grave and silent. They asked questions and wondered, but they received no answer; so, by degrees their curiosity died away.

But Marcus Sinclair thought of this name and of this secret of his, many times before the day drew near, when he hoped that Claire would come and make her home with him. He knew that her coming would cause surprise—would be the subject of much conversation and many surmises. And yet he had wished to bury the past; it was dark, it was cruel—why should he bring any of it up again, except the one bright spot in it? Why should he have to think of his father's name, when he had tried to forget that it belonged to him? Would Claire wish to keep

her name of Islay? It was an old name, and could be traced back many generations, and none of the family would lightly drop it. And yet—it was a hateful name to Marcus Sinclair, and his face would flush and his eyes darken as he thought of it.

That first evening,—when Claire was expressing her pleasure in the home to which he had brought her, and he, in return, was referring to the luxuries and comforts which she would most surely miss,—the thought in connection with his name flashed across him and struck him coldly. But he would not force the thought from him, even in those sweet first moments of his sister's companionship. Better to know then, at the very beginning of their life together, whether she would share his secret and make his name her own, helping him to forget the years of his boyhood, and of the father who had driven him as an outcast from his doors.

It was a soft, still evening in early spring; so warm and fragrant with the scents of the early flowers, that the large window of the drawing-room was thrown wide open, and the brother and sister sat close to it, looking



out across the small stretch of grass which formed the little garden attached to the house.

During the pauses in conversation Claire glanced furtively at the brother, of whom she felt rather afraid. She had longed and yearned to see him again,—to be with him ; and yet, now that they were together, she scarcely knew what to say to him, or how to tell him how happy she was. Her thoughts were in strange commotion, and could find no utterance in words. She felt a strong impulse to put her arms round his neck and love him, as she had done many years ago, when she was a child. But she refrained—she did not like to ; he was so grave, so much older-looking than he used to be, and she had lost her childish frankness and freedom. She could not do impulsively what she used to ; she shrank from displaying what she was feeling most.

“ Claire.”

She half started, for his deep voice sounded somehow different to what it had been when he had last spoken.

“ Yes, Marc,” she said, looking at him



with her large earnest eyes, and wondering what he was going to say.

“Do you know, Claire, that you have a name that I hate—that I wish to forget and bury as part of a dark past! Can you,—will you drop it for my sake?”

His face flushed as he spoke, and unconsciously his voice grew very stern. It was a subject that touched him nearly, and he was so unaccustomed to receive sympathy when he most needed it, that even now he forgot to look to his sister for it. The habit of covering what he deeply felt within a cold, severe exterior, was not one that could be easily broken through. It had grown on him to a greater degree than he thought, as years had advanced.

“You mean our surname, Islay?” said Claire, in low tones, turning from him and looking out of the window.

“Not *our* surname, Claire!” he exclaimed, leaning forward, and speaking in quick, angry accents. “It may be yours, but it is not *mine*. I have tried to forget it—not to know it. I hate the sound of—”

He broke off suddenly, for he felt two soft

hands trembling in his, and two great brown eyes, full of tears, looking mournfully down at him.

“Oh! what a brute I am to speak like this to you, Claire,” he said, in tones of self-reproach. “I have grown into a rough bear all these years that I have spent by myself. Forgive me, little sister, forgive me; I did not mean to hurt you.”

His deep voice grew gentle, and his stern face tender, as he drew Claire close to him. How he hated himself for having spoken so fiercely to her, and for having brought those tears to her eyes.

“It’s all right, Marc; I didn’t mean to be so foolish,” she said, smiling, and her whole face brightening as she heard him call her by an old pet name; “only don’t look so dark, because it makes me feel afraid of you, and oh! Marc, I want to love you—not be afraid of you.”

“Ah! little sister,” he replied, in an unsteady voice, for he was deeply moved, “have I not waited all these years for you to come and love me, and now—now, even during these first hours of our meeting—I am

making you fear me. Claire, forget it—forget that I spoke roughly and sternly to you. I wouldn't have—”

“Marc, don't; it was nothing,” she broke in hastily, almost frightened at the passion of emotion that was passing over his dark face. “It was only that you spoke and looked quite different to what I thought you used to.”

“And you will find me different, too, in every way, Claire,” he said, looking gloomily out into the darkening sky. “I am hard, and stern, and selfish. I do not look on life in the same way as I did when you were a child, and I scarcely more than a boy. I distrust most men, and sweep my hard judgments over all of them. How could it have been otherwise? What has there been to prevent my growing like this? What softness has there been in my life to make me a gentle or a noble man? Nothing—nothing.”

He spoke bitterly,—sadly. Though he may not have been gentle or noble, still, he was honest; and he knew he was not what he would have had himself be. As he looked back over the years that had gone by, he felt

that once he had made better, higher resolutions ; he had kept before him nobler ideals ; he had looked upon human nature with a wider, kindlier eye. And as his deeper feelings were stirred he felt how imperfect he was ; how he had failed in all his noblest aspirations.

“Marc, won’t you forget the past ?” Claire asked, in a low voice, as she softly stroked one of his large, blue-veined hands. “Can’t we try and begin again, and not think of what came before to-day ? Shall we—”

“Will my little sister be content, then, if her name is Claire Sinclair instead of—of the other ?” he interrupted, taking her two hands in his, and looking down steadily, but gently, into her face.

He would not frighten her again with his fierceness. Her nature was the same delicately susceptible one it used to be, and then he had loved and cherished it ; surely now he would not hurt it.

She paused a moment before she answered. She did not glance away from the eyes that were gazing down into her own, but she looked back earnestly into them. They



were strange, grave eyes, darker than her own, and deeper set. The forehead above them was high and white; it was a clever, thoughtful forehead, with dark, thick hair, streaked here and there with a premature grey, falling heavily over it.

“Well, little sister?” he said, gently, as still she did not answer.

His voice roused her. She was wondering how she could have lived all those seven years without him, and whether she had loved him before as much as she felt she loved him that moment.

With a quick gesture she drew her hands from his, and then, with all the old childish impetuosity, she flung her arms round his neck.

“Let me love you, Marc,” she said, “for, oh! I *am* so happy!”

The young doctor's face grew softer; every grave and stern line seemed to vanish. The cloud that had darkened his life lifted, and he smiled and revelled in the brightness that shone on him. If he had been a religious man he would have gone down on his knees at that moment and thanked God for His



goodness. He would have recognized that the Hand that had withheld so many things from him, was an All-Wise, All-Loving Hand, which had taken from him at one time, only that at another It might restore more richly, more fully blessed. But Marcus Sinclair had buried his religion—he had starved his soul. He had tried to bind the infinite within the finite. He was an upright, conscientious, hard-working, even high-minded man, with many wishes to live a life above the petty, egoistic, narrow lives he saw around him, but,—he was not religious. He had thought he knew better than his God, and so had rebelled against Him.

The room grew dark; the night air stirred gently, and sent chilly gusts now and again in at the open window. Still the brother and sister did not move. From time to time they spoke in low voices, but they oftener found silence more eloquent than words.

At length they both rose, and stood for a moment by the open window.

“Marc,” said Claire, “I have not answered your question yet.”

“No, little sister, you haven’t,” he replied.

He had not referred again to his name, but had waited for Claire to give him her answer voluntarily, and she had not yet done so.

“Make me a promise first, Marc, before I answer you?” she asked.

“Nay, nay, Claire, I have grown too old to make promises,” he replied with a sigh, “they are what we make when we are boys; then—we keep them, but now,—when we are men, we break them, and think nothing of it. Don’t ask me to promise anything, Claire,—I am a doctor, you know, and doctors never keep promises.”

“Ah! but, Marc, it is only that I want you to say that you will let me share everything with you. I want you to let me know what you are thinking about and feeling, and what is troubling you, and what you like, and what you don’t like. Can’t you—can’t you tell me everything that is in your heart—always, now that—that we are together again?”

It was too dark for him to see her face, but he heard her breath coming quick and short.

“What are you asking me, Claire?” he

replied, bitterly, half-turning from her, and covering his eyes with his hand, "Can I open what I have closely shut? Can I unlock the door when I have buried the key and know not where to find it? Can I undo what seven lonely years have done? Can I change what this world has made me into? Claire—what—*what* are you asking me?"

Slowly he drew away from her, and flung himself into a chair close by. Once he had been open, impulsive, demonstrative, wishing to tell every thought and every feeling to those around him. Once he had sought for sympathy in everything, and would have laid bare his heart with little or no reserve. But it was not so now. He hated anyone knowing what he was thinking about. He drew himself in with proud, cold reticence when he was most nearly touched. He repulsed any who sought to draw closer to him, and who wished to know him as he was, and not as he made himself out to be. He had received heavy blows in his youth; they had not killed him, but they had marked him for life. Could he undo what had been done?

Could he unsuffer what he had suffered? No; it was too late. Yet—he felt a hot flush of emotion rising to his brow, and his strong hands trembling. How sweet it would be if—

Small, cold fingers were laid on his.

“Marc, I forgot. I have not answered your question yet. What is yours is mine, and I would have no other surname than the one you bear. What you have dropped and tried to forget I will drop and forget . . .”

She hesitated a moment. He did not speak, for he felt that there was something more that she was going to say.

But just then there was borne in through the open window a plaintive strain of music. Claire heard it, and raised her head to listen.

“What’s that, Marc?” she asked, in a whisper; “it sounds like a violin.”

“Oh, it’s only Franz Humbert and his fiddle,” he replied, dragging himself wearily up from his chair and going with her to the open window again. “He lives in the house next to this, not above twenty yards from here, and he is always playing when —”

“Listen, Marc!” she interrupted, softly;



“surely there is more than one instrument that we hear!”

And so it seemed, for the low, complaining air had passed into a storm of vehemence and power, that sounded as if not one, but many violins, were striving to give utterance to some burst of feeling.

“No, Claire, it is only one,” said her brother, in under tones, knowing the man and the instrument better than she did; “but he who has the bow in his hand is a genius. An odd, eccentric fellow, some call him, massacring music with his hideous discords. But I don’t think it’s that; he is trying to give vent to some of the passions that we feel, and can’t—aye, and dare not express in words. He is often in and out of here—fancies this room is good for sound, I believe, so you’ll make his acquaintance before long.”

He paused.

The wild music was dying away again into a soft, sweet melody.

“Marc, don’t you think that by-and-bye, when, perhaps, we have lived some years together, that you will be able to—to trust



me to know what you are thinking and feeling? I want so to help you to forget—forget the past, and try and make —”

“What are you asking me, little sister?” he broke in hastily, using, unconsciously, again the same words as he had before.

But the tone in which they were said, was *not* the same. He was raising his eyes again to the cup that, years ago, had been dashed from him, and he saw, though dimly, that its contents were still sweet.

## CHAPTER IV.

### ABBEYSLEA'S MONITOR.

ABBEYSLEA was a neighbourhood where mostly well-to-do people dwelt. It was at a sufficient distance from the large town of O— to be termed—"in the country." Yet it was only a good half-hour's walk from that town, and some of the broad, well-kept roads would lead straight into the narrow slums and streets where poverty reigned. But no one who resided in Abbeyslea, had anything to do with O—, except to use it for shopping purposes, and, occasionally, conversational. The inhabitants of Abbeyslea were superior in every way, and kept themselves to themselves in a most refined and praiseworthy manner. If a tradesman and his family were presumptuous and thought that they had toiled hard and long enough behind a counter in O—, and would like to be free and at rest in the countrified suburb of Abbeyslea, they

might take their good sized villa and its garden, but they might not mix in the society around them. *That* was forbidden. It was quite sufficient honour and pleasure for them to see the ladies and gentlemen in whose neighbourhood they dwelt, to mark their customs and ways, to hear them speaking, and—to receive their snubs. Surely they could not look for, or in any way expect, more than this! At least this was the idea of the majority of the gentry residing in Abbeyslea; there were, of course, a few exceptions!

Curiously, though Abbeyslea was a comparatively new made district, none of the houses bearing the impress of more than thirty or forty years, it possessed an old Parish Church. How it came to be that a thirteenth century Church stood there, no one knew. But when the district had grown into a distinct and separate Parish, there was some division of opinion as to whether the old, grey-stoned, ivy-covered, partly-ruined Edifice should be restored, or whether a new brick one should be erected. It was decided in favour of the former, and thus it was that

this large, disused House of God became again a Place of Worship.

All the people in Abbeyslea were good church people ; no such thing as a chapel was heard of or mentioned among them. They attended Divine Service every Sunday morning, without intermission, unless prevented by ill-health or absence from home. Occasionally also, they would drop in to the evening Service, in order to show the Rector that they appreciated his kindness, and thought it quite correct that he should hold a second Service on the Sabbath day. Sometimes one or two of them would attend the two weekly Readings of Prayer, which took place on Wednesdays and Fridays. But this did not occur often.

The grey-haired Rector was one of the old school ; strictly conservative in politics, and strictly conservative in his religious opinions. The world changed its ways of looking at things, its customs and its beliefs, but the Rector did not. He looked at his flock with a quiet, complacent glance, knowing that his own doctrines were sound and good enough, and hoping that theirs were too. The living



was a fairly comfortable one ; there were no poor to be attended to, there was no prevailing dissent to provoke controversy, and there was no open evil-doing,—though perhaps, there was some inclination to evil-speaking and gossiping. Still,—this last was a thing that could not be prevented ; go where anyone would they would probably hear the same thing, that the inhabitants of each and every neighbourhood were addicted to much talking. And, after all, thought the Rector, this evil, if evil it can be termed, only shows that there is a certain amount of unselfishness among people, in that they are not so completely wrapped up in themselves and their own affairs, as to be unmindful of their neighbours and their concerns.

In one of the largest houses in Abbeyslea lived a lady, who possessed a wide-spread influence upon all those around her. She had a husband, a very kind, generous man, but—he was nobody. It was *Mrs.* Forrester's house, and *Mrs.* Forrester's word that was the law, and *Mrs.* Forrester's opinion that was feared ; for *Mr.* Forrester was only—*Mrs.* Forrester's husband. And yet he was a



good man, and she was not a good woman, though she thought she was. He was a devoted and unselfish husband, and she was a cold, capricious wife, who cared only to make him her slave, and talk slightly of him and to him.

She was a clever woman, with a fine face, and distinguished manner; able to fascinate, and able to carry out what she set her mind upon carrying out. Consequently she was a very important member of society, and what she thought or said was passed from mouth to mouth, and was seldom disagreed with or disputed. Many admired her, many envied her, many wished that they were like her, but—nobody loved her, except her husband, who overlooked all her faults, forgave her all her petty tyrannies, and went on idealizing her, seeing always a beam in his own eye, but never so much as a mote in hers. Children were frightened of Mrs. Forrester because she said hard things to them, and brought tears to their eyes, and dark terrors to their little hearts. Women feared her, looked up to her, yet, at times, hated her, but wouldn't own to it, because she

was "the best society" in Abbeyslea, and it would not be worldly wisdom to be anything but fast friends with her. And men were attracted by her, complimented her, and excited her vanity and self-love; but, between themselves, they talked of her as a dangerous woman. Very clever, but most illogical; very charming as an acquaintance, but one before whom it would be well for words to be carefully chosen, and sentiments sparingly expressed. She seemed to possess a marvellous facility for enlarging upon what she saw, heard, and felt; being fluent, even eloquent, in speech, having a hard heart, and not very strict notions of truth.

The morning after Claire's arrival in Marc's house, as the ill fates would have it, she accidentally became acquainted with this lady. Marcus Sinclair disliked Mrs. Forrester; why, he scarcely knew, for her character was quite enigmatical to him. Still he always had the feeling about her that she was, amongst women, one that would deteriorate, not elevate. So he had thought whether he should warn Claire against her. He saw that his little frank,

impulsive child-sister had grown into a woman with an innocent and guileless nature. He could look into her face and see that, notwithstanding the hard and rather bitter experiences of her home life, there was no shadow of alloy upon it. She had seen and known wrong and evil in others, but her own spirit was pure. The knowledge of it had saddened her life, and taken from her her blithe and sunny childhood ; it had made her look upon those around her with a sort of fear and misgiving ; it had wrenched from her her trust and confidence. But she, herself, was good and true, and her brother wished to guard her, with even jealous care and love, from that which would change her. Consequently, he wondered to himself whether it would be best to tell his sister of his dislike to Mrs. Forrester or no.

But his daily round of visits began early, and there was not time for more than a few minutes' conversation before he started. Twice, however, the thought of Mrs. Forrester crossed his mind, and he half wished to give Claire a few words of caution about her. But he had a man's dislike to

touch upon what he could not exactly define ; so he thought he would wait until the evening. There would be more time then, and he would be able to give Claire a clearer idea of what he feared in this lady's society, than he could hurriedly, then, in the morning.

So, as he stood for one moment at the gate that led from his little garden into the high road, and stooped his tall form down to kiss her, he only said —

“ Good-bye, Claire. Remember this is your home now ; you are mistress of the house, and are to do exactly what you like with it. I have no doubt you will find plenty to do and set in order,—for a solitary man, absorbed in himself and his own cares, hasn't much idea of how things in a house ought to go. So—do whatever you like, dear, and arrange all as you would have it, and don't fear but that I shall be pleased . . .”

He hesitated a moment, and then added, with a smile that softened the stern lines on his face —

“ Best of all to me, little sister, is this new, strange knowledge, that I have someone in my house waiting for me, and ready to



welcome me home when I come. — I wondered whether this thought would ever be mine.”

And then he went off to his work and looked out upon the world and saw that the fresh, tender buds of Spring were diamond-dewed, and the clouds of early morning “pure and white as flocks new-shorn ;” and, listening, he heard that there was music around him everywhere. Many other Spring mornings had he looked out upon before ; many hundreds of times before had the birds sung to him, but he had seen and heard nothing. Life had not been pleasant to him, and so he had looked upon the beautiful world of Nature with a dark, unseeing eye. But now, it was different ; the heart within him was stirred, and the path before him was light, for he had the picture of a soft face looking at him all the way, and the sound of a voice mingling all the time with the songs of the birds.

And Claire went back to her new home and thought to herself that there was nothing so dear in the whole wide world as a brother. That she would do all she could to make



him happy, and to live and be exactly as he would like. That she would try and make his home beautiful for him, and let everything run smoothly and well. That nothing should ever come between them, or any dark cloud overshadow them.

Castles in the air ! Dreams of what might be ! Thoughts with not a touch of worldly reckoning in them !—This is young life as it looks out on a fair Spring morning, and wonders why the world is unhappy, and wherein lies its sin ! And yet, not many days, perhaps hours before, that same young life had been in the depths of despair and misery, and had thought all before it was dark, and all joy and hope a myth. Such is human nature !—

Claire would have liked to have stayed out in the fresh morning air, and have looked about her to see in what kind of neighbourhood she had come to dwell ; but she knew there were things she wished to see to and arrange in the house. She had very little idea of what housekeeping meant, or of the care women generally find that it entails. She thought the whole of it could be summed

up into three parts, *i.e.* :—ordering what her brother would like,—making the rooms in which he lived pretty,—and being always happy herself and ready to welcome him home. She never conceived for a moment that, after awhile, she might find the duties in the house so arduous and engrossing, that she would forget to be bright when he came in, or to smile when she saw him coming, or to talk when he wished her to. But, perhaps, the knowledge of these things would come to her later on, when the novelty of strangeness and high ideas had worn off.

The house, her brother had chosen for his home, was one of several that stood a little way off from the high road leading to O — . It was smaller, and seemed to be of rather older date than the others, for its stone walls were covered high up with creepers, and its slate roof was in parts lichen-grown. In the small garden that lay around were several trees, which spread their shading boughs far over the wide road on the one side, and shadowed the little stretch of grass on the other.

“I shall get very fond of this garden,”

thought Claire to herself, as, after having spent most of the morning indoors, unpacking her worldly goods and arranging various things in the way her fancy led her, she stepped outside to breathe in the fresh balmy air.

“The grass is soft and mossy, and the big trees make one think there is more garden further on, which one cannot see,” she went on, speaking half-aloud to herself, as she wandered slowly down the narrow, unkept and weedy path, which lay close to the thick line of shrubs, forming a barrier between the road and the garden. “I rather wish, though, that these bushes had grown a little higher, because passers-by can just see me if I stand upright, and—if Marc were here, they would see all his head and shoulders,—he’s so tall.”

She paused a moment, as she stood on tip-toe, and tried to look over the shrubs. She could just see that there was a hedge on the opposite side of the road, and fields beyond. But she wanted to see more than this, so she retraced her steps back by the little unkept path, until she came to the gateway which led into the road.

“I did look out here when I watched Marc go off early this morning,” she continued, still half-aloud; “but I think I couldn’t have seen anything but him, then. I wonder—”

The thought, that was crossing her, was evidently a pleasant one, for she broke off with a soft light shining in her brown eyes, and a smile playing on her lips.

“I wonder . . . ,” she repeated, “whether the people about here admire him very much. He is so tall, and strong, and broad, and has such a dark, handsome face. It’s like what it used to be in a way, and yet—not like. I remember—remember I used to think he had a beautiful face then—always—but it isn’t quite—not quite beautiful now, except when he smiles. He is very grave, and doesn’t look as if he ever laughed much, but then—”

A shadow fell over her face, and she sighed as she stopped abruptly in her sentence.

The road, up which she was looking, was long and straight. The fields that lay on one side of it sloped gently down to a wide and slow-coursing river, whose waters



gleamed and shimmered in the sunlight. On the other side of the river were more fields, lying flat, with giant trees growing on them. Beyond these, the country was hilly and thickly wooded.

“I like all that part—very much,” thought Claire, forgetting about Marc for the moment, and only thinking of what she was looking at; “but I wonder where the large town is—I suppose it’s—the other way.”

And as she said this she turned her head, but, almost with the same movement, drew back quickly within the open garden gate. For, not half-a-dozen steps off, was a lady walking in her direction, who evidently, from the expression on her face, had been watching her with some interest.

“I hope this place is a kind of countrified one, where you can do what you like and not be talked about,” thought Claire, turning to go back to the house, and remembering for the first time that she had no hat on. “That lady looked rather as if —”

“Is it Miss Sinclair I have the pleasure of seeing?”

Claire started, but did not turn her head.



She wondered whom the lady she had just seen could be addressing, for she hadn't noticed anyone else coming along the road. Also, she did not recognise her own new surname, having forgotten that she was no longer Claire Islay, but Claire Sinclair.

"Pardon me,—but I am not mistaken, am I,—in thinking that you are Dr. Sinclair's sister?"

This time the voice sounded so close to her, that Claire stopped short and looked round; a hot, nervous colour mounting to her brow as she did so. It must be her that this lady was addressing, for she was evidently referring to Marc, when she mentioned "Dr. Sinclair."

"Yes, I—I am—Marc's sister," she stammered, wishing she had not gone to the garden gate to look out; but, at the same time thinking how strange it was to hear Marc called Dr. Sinclair.

"I thought you must be,—not from your likeness to him exactly, but because newcomers always like to go *just outside* their gates to look around. And I knew you were coming this week, though I couldn't find out

from your brother the precise day,—he is inclined to be very—isn't he?—very *close*. I can't bear people being close. But I knew it must be you, so I thought I would be friendly and introduce myself without any ceremony."

As the lady thus spoke Claire looked at her with a half-frightened, half-admiring gaze. She saw before her a tall, handsome woman, very fair, with an exquisite complexion and large blue eyes, that looked blandly and complacently into her own, *after* they had wandered from her hair to her uncovered hands, her lightly-shod feet, and her dress. They seemed to take in the size of her waist, the breadth of her shoulders, her exact height, the way her hair was done, and her manner of standing—all in that glance, before she met Claire's eyes, and before she had finished her sentence. Her voice was clear and rather high-pitched, her tones suave but imperious, her manner condescendingly inviting.

Claire was puzzled. It was very good of this lady to come and speak to her; but she might just as well have said something

nice about Marc instead of calling him "close."

"Thank you; it is very kind of you," she said, dropping her eyes before the gaze of those cold, blue ones, and feeling herself getting hotter and hotter as she spoke. "I know I ought not to have been standing outside our gate just now, but—but I was in the garden, and I could—could only —"

"I understand, Miss Sinclair, you needn't explain," broke in the lady, with a short ripple of laughter; "as if I didn't know that all young folks like to look about them, and see whether they can find out who their neighbours are, or whether there is anything particularly interesting about their surroundings. I daresay—now, I daresay that brother of yours hasn't told you anything. Be open,—tell me,—what has he been saying to you about us all? Has he given us a good character, or has he been abusing us?"

She drew a step closer to the girl, and Claire, feeling the movement, raised her eyes and looked doubtingly at her.

"I don't know what you mean, exactly," she said, gravely. "Marc and I havn't talked

about anyone yet, except—, except ourselves—at least, not about any outside people. You see, we are so pleased to see each other again, and have so much to tell, that we havn't thought about anything else yet."

"Ah! it is a good number of years since you met, is it not?" asked the lady, putting the question almost before Claire had finished her sentence. "We have always wondered where Dr. Sinclair's relations could be. It was strange—very strange—that he shouldn't have any, or ever speak of his home before he came here. But I daresay *you* will tell us *all* about it, now you have come."

The voice and the manner were encouraging and friendly; but, as Claire's eyes sought those of her interlocutor, she saw there a curiosity and keen desire for information, which made her think that perhaps this lady was anxious to know more about Marc, than he wished her to. So she did not answer the implied question, but only said, with gentle courtesy of manner —

"I shall not know whom to tell Marc that I have seen. May I ask what your name is?"



It is so kind of you to have come and spoken to me."

The slightest shade of annoyance seemed to pass over the handsome, fair lady's face, as thus quietly and easily Claire evaded her question.

"This girl is not so soft and innocent as she looks," she thought; "close and near like her brother,—though she has such a childish expression."

Mrs. Forrester's logic did not extend so far as to know, that a perfectly true and straightforward nature baffles unconsciously, where often a more keen and worldly wise one will fail.

Aloud she said, with an accession of dignity that was unfortunately lost upon Dr. Sinclair's sister —

"I am Mrs. Forrester, of whom, no doubt, your brother has told you,—and I am at the head of the best society in Abbeyslea. I shall come and call on you in a few days, and then afterwards I shall hope to see you at my 'At Homes,'—where you will meet everyone whom you ought to know. Good morning, and tell Dr. Sinclair from me, that I am glad I have



made your acquaintance so soon, though it was scarcely—in a conventional way.”

She smiled, and held out her beautifully-gloved hand, which Claire just touched; feeling, at the same time, that some reproof was conveyed to her, for having stood outside the gate, regardless of appearances.

“She is not a bad-looking girl,” thought Mrs. Forrester to herself, as she walked down the road, only fairly satisfied with her interview with Dr. Sinclair’s sister. “Her eyes are rather attractive, but she would have been better a few inches taller,—dresses too plainly, and blushes up when she is spoken to as if she were a school-girl of sixteen. There is some mystery about them both, but—now, she’s here—I shall soon find out what it is;—I always *have* thought that young Dr. Sinclair, with his dark face and bearish ways, had *something* unsatisfactory about his antecedents;—those silent kind of men always have,—that’s why they don’t go into society, and prefer being alone,—they have something to be ashamed of, and they are afraid of people finding it out. But—but it always happens, after a while, that it

comes to light,—and then they are done for, and have to leave—to leave the place.”

At which satisfactory conclusion of her charitable hypothesis, Mrs. Forrester seemed fairly pleased; for she stroked her rich mantle down musingly, drew her tall and stately figure up, and was more pleasant and communicative than usual, to the friends she next met.

## CHAPTER V.

FRANZ HUMBERT.

THERE were sounds of a vigorous scraping and tuning of a violin.

Evidently the instrument was out of sorts, and would not, or could not, respond to the player's earnest entreaties. Either the spring weather had come too suddenly, and the strings rebelled against the softness of the atmosphere around them ; or else they were refusing to recognise, that the new lower G string had any right amongst them. They preferred the old one, which had done good service, had borne much erratic usage, and had finally snapped with a bang, which had made them all shudder, and caused an exclamation of dismay to escape from the lips of the wielder of the bow.

But now their Master's long and delicate fingers were trembling with vexation and high nervous tension, as again and again

he slightly raised or lowered the captious string. His sensitive ear told him that the sound was not as it should be.

At length, with wild impatience, he swept the bow once,—twice,—thrice,—across the strings in hideous discord, exclaiming, as the last unmelodious notes vibrated in the air —

“The base fiends take the thing! Insatiable cormorants.—Didn’t I leave them the whole of this long morning, while I tranquilly slept, to play their evil jokes? And still they are not satisfied, but must needs lay their ugly hands on me and the strings and the—the——confound them all. And I took over three hours selecting that string,—there’s no nearer,——it’s—it’s the exact one, but—there’s foul play—foul play, I say.”

The violinist shook back angrily his long, yellow hair, and strode to the large French window. With fierce haste, he threw it wide open.

“Walk out, gentlemen, walk out,” he said, imperatively, waving his arms backwards and forwards, and speaking to his imaginary host of fiends. “There’s plenty of room



for you out there, and there's no reason—no reason at all—why you should crowd inside with me. Avaunt!—Avaunt!—your societies are not needed.—My instrument and I are quite enough,—you've had your time, it's my turn now, so —— begone. Rascals,—*gourmands*, begone !”

A whiff of air caught the sweet scent of deep-coloured violets and pale primroses, and bore it up to the expostulating and ill-used man. But it did not soothe his highly-wrought spirit; it only made him angrier, because the fiends did not seem to be invading the atmosphere outside, so they must, perforce, be still holding sway within.

With a frantic gesture, he again reclosed the window, seized his violin, and took one long step into the darkest recess in his music room.

“ They shall die,—I'll choke and smother them by jarrings more hideous than they can make themselves. They shan't have the chance of getting out now,—I'll have my revenge.—Listen, ye fiends, listen, and—be smothered, and—and—die.”

Wherewith, in breathless haste, and with a

face white and quivering with emotion, he drew from his beloved instrument, a stormy maelstrom of weird, fantastic sounds. Discord upon discord smote through the room, and seemed to draw faint groans of remonstrance from the small organ, piano, and other violins that were there. But the player paid no heed to the appeals around. He seemed to be taking a fierce and horrid pleasure in drawing forth the harshest sounds he could, to choke and kill the fiends,—though it were at no little cost to himself that he did so.

The hand that held the bow was firm and steady, but the long fingers that ran rapidly over the strings were moist and feverish, while the face that bent down close to them grew strained with a sort of dark dismay.

“Die, ye fiends, die—die!” he muttered, between his clenched teeth; “this—this—”

He drew his bow heavily and pitilessly across the sensitive notes, and sent a terrible and despairing wail through the room,

“This is your death-cry, and this—” (the perverse lower G trembled, and muttered out its groaning response,)

“This your waiting grave. — Dead and buried fiends—lie there.”

And then Franz Humbert laid his instrument down, placed his fingers in his ears, lest he should hear the echo of his wild phantasia, and strode again to the window.

He stood there a few minutes silently, breathing hard and fast, then he slowly opened it, and stepped out into the garden.

The madness of his wild humour was passed;—the fiends were dead and buried. So now he smiled as he heard the birds twittering busily in the trees, and as he saw the great slanting rays of light cast around by the setting sun. The fragrance of the spring flowers seemed sweet to him, for he stooped down and gathered some of those most strongly scented, and placed them carefully in the button-hole of his coat.

He was a slim built man of medium height, with long hands and long feet. His yellow hair was thrown back high from his white forehead, and fell in a wave at the nape of his neck. His eyes were blue, almost purple in colouring, shaded by heavy lids, which, when at all lowered, entirely altered the ex-

pression of the whole face. His nose was aquiline, the nostrils being sharply, yet delicately, cut. The mouth was almost entirely hidden by a long moustache, of the same hue as his hair. The whole face was that of an *artiste*, sensitive, highly-wrought, over susceptible. It was a face that sympathetic people would look at and pity, because they would instinctively feel, that it belonged to one who could not bear to be roughly handled by the world, and therefore one that would have to pass through much exquisite torture. Other people—the majority, not sympathetic ones—would stare, laugh at, and jar upon this most unfortunately sensitive nature, thinking that such peculiar emotional specimens of humanity ought not to exist, or, at all events, *ought* to have sufficient control over themselves as to, at least, appear rational beings.

Franz Humbert strolled dreamily once or twice up and down his little plot of grass, stopping now and again to listen to some note from a bird that seemed sweeter to him than the rest, or occasionally to look across into the garden next to his.



Suddenly a thought seemed to strike him, for he turned sharp round, laughed a high tenor laugh, which had as much glee in it as a schoolboy's, and hastened back to his house.

"It's that room—that room!" he exclaimed aloud; "it's out of sorts, and so it harbours fiends. They are dead now, but—but no credit to them, or to it. And I have treated my brother,—my beloved brother, badly, hurt and punished him as much as I hurt myself. Ah! but I will love him again most tenderly. I will——yes, Sinclair's room—I will go to it, and there—there we will talk most sweetly together, and forget the madness of those moments. Sound never goes wrong in Sinclair's room, it has a charm over it, which cannot be uncharmed.—Come, my brother, come; no malice-bearing,—no."

Gently he lifted his beloved instrument—his brother,—and with loving care looked closely at it. Bitter remorse was already rising in his heart at the rough usage, it had received from him.

"Fool that I was," he went on, in tones of self-reproach; "I might have known it was this den, and not—not him."

In an abstracted way he glanced round the room for his hat; but, not seeing it, he muttered impatiently, and dashed off in haste without it.

With his instrument under his arm, he ran down to the further end of his garden, where a low stone wall divided it from that of his right hand neighbour's. He was a lithe, agile man, and in a moment had scaled the wide, moss-grown wall, and was rushing up the narrow pathway, down which Claire Sinclair had that morning wandered.

The front door of the doctor's house stood ajar, and without ceremony Franz Humbert pushed it further open and entered. For he had a free pass into this house, and might go in or out as he liked.

Marcus Sinclair had felt that this strange, erratic man had somewhere a chord within his nature, that struck in harmony with some of the uncertain notes that were in his own. And so, perhaps, more than anyone else in the district, he let the violinist have his own eccentric ways, and took a kind of pleasure in watching the workings of his sensitive face, and hearing him utter on his instrument

the wild emotions that seemed to seize him and hold him in their sway. Thus, Franz Humbert thought nothing of entering the doctor's abode, at what time in the day he felt inclined, and whether the owner of it were at home or no.

Claire was in her brother's drawing-room, and had just sat herself down in his large easy chair, to survey the many small alterations and improvements she had been making. She was feeling tired with what she had been doing, and was wondering whether Marc would notice and be pleased with her arrangements, or whether he were too preoccupied and clever to think of such small things. After having lived so many years by himself, and having had no one to take care of his rooms and make them look pretty for him, she rather thought that perhaps he would notice the changes in them. Still, she made up her mind not to be very disappointed if he did not do so.

Suddenly, she heard quick, rapid footsteps up the door-steps, and she half rose with an exclamation of surprise and pleasure, for she thought it must be Marc come home earlier

than he had anticipated. But in another moment she was undeceived.

With his shock of yellow hair disarranged by his hasty run through the air, his long feet encased in bright-red slippers, his short velveteen coat greened by his climb over the wall, and his eyes looking as if they saw nothing of what was before them,—the violinist darted in.

He did not see that there was anyone in the room. He was too absorbed in the pleasure of the thought that had brought him here, and in the happy influence that he felt was penetrating him.

“Now, now, my spirit—,” he murmured, half aloud, “let us talk together. Let us speak most—most sweetly,—angel’s wings fluttering,—rays of sunshine,—faces,—little children’s faces—”

There was one short moment of careful tuning, and then, with a grunt of perfect content, the Master raised his violin to his shoulder, and invoked his spirit.

Claire sank back noiselessly into her chair, with a look in which amusement and uncertainty as to what to do, were blended.



She had been considerably startled at first by the eccentric apparition, and with difficulty had suppressed her astonishment and almost fear. But it had flashed quickly upon her, what her brother had said of his next-door neighbour, of his strange genius, and of the likelihood there was, that she would before long become acquainted with him. So, instead of making the unceremonious visitor aware of her presence, she remained quiet and unobserved; at first intently watching the violinist's expressive face, then—seeing it only as in a thick mist, as she lost herself in the deep, subtle power of his music.

The low, sweet melody that was filling the room, was played with the most delicate and airy grace. The Master and his instrument were no longer at variance with each other; they were as brother to brother,—soul to soul. The man was asking his almost human companion to express forth in the bewildering beauty of sound, the strange and overpowering feeling of rapture that he had within him. And the instrument, with perfect sympathy, responded to each tiny variation of the touch, each susceptible movement of the inspiring

spirit. The fanciful, highly-wrought violinist as he played on, seemed to hear the rustle of angels' wings, and saw long robes trailing in fleecy clouds, as they passed over a sapphire sky.

"My brother, my brother," he whispered, bending his head lower and lower, "more—more still,—little children's faces with—with halos round them."

Softer and softer grew the melody ; sweeter and more fascinating the harmonious strains. The player seemed no longer leading his instrument on to express what he desired,—the instrument was subduing and leading him ; for there was awe, even surprise, mingling with the joy on his face.

But just as the exquisite refrain was being repeated so delicately and tremulously, that it seemed but an echo of what had come before, Franz Humbert stopped short and lowered his bow. A spasm of sharp pain crossed his face, and took from it every trace of colour. Trembling, he again raised his bow, and gently, yet firmly, drew it across the strings, sending a cry wailing through the room.

"There are no *children* now," he groaned,

as he listened to the vibrations of those last notes—"no children,—no little angel faces,—all spoilt,—all dressed-up dolls and puppets. Oh, you Mothers—Mothers, where are the angel faces of your—your little children?"

Then, laying down his violin, he burst into tears.

Claire rose, frightened, strangely moved by this unexpected ending to the sweet melody. She scarcely knew what to think or what to say; only she felt a deep pity rising up within her heart for this eccentric man, who seemed so completely overpowered by his storm of contending emotions.

She trod softly to him, as he stood with his face buried in his hands, and gently touched his arm.

"Can I do anything for you?" she asked, in low tones, half afraid of hearing her own voice break the silence, that had ensued after the burst of tears. "I am very sorry for —"

At the sound of these words, the violinist started violently, and dropped his hands from his face. Surprise, misgiving, amazement were depicted on his countenance, as he gazed blankly at the girl.

“What are you doing here?” he asked, interrupting her, and putting the question with scant courtesy. “And who are you?”

If the face of the violinist had not been so terribly in earnest, the absurdity of the situation would have made Claire laugh. As it was, she could not prevent a smile breaking over her face as she answered —

“I am Marc’s—I mean—Dr. Sinclair’s sister.”

“No, you are not,” he said. “Sinclair hasn’t a sister,—he hasn’t any belongings at all.—You oughtn’t to be here.—Go away.”

“But I *am* his sister,” returned Claire, quite gravely, wondering how she could prove what she was saying, if this strange man continued to disbelieve her. “I am going to live with him always now, and—”

“But Sinclair *hasn’t* a sister,” he repeated, emphatically, pointing to the door as he spoke; “and you had better go before he returns, for he won’t like your being here. Go,—I tell you he hasn’t got a —”

Franz Humbert stopped short, for at this moment the doctor’s tall, dark figure appeared within the doorway. A look of



amusement passed over the doctor's face as he glanced from his sister to the violinist, and noticed the latter's disturbed and anxious expression. Before, however, he could speak Claire was at his side, and, raising her face up to his, said —

“ Quick, Marc, quick, give me a kiss. He won't believe I'm your sister, though I've told him I am. But he *must* believe if he sees you kissing me.”

“ Ah ! Claire,” said her brother, as he bent his head down, “ do you know you spoke then just in the old, impulsive way, you used to when you were a child ? And so this is how you have been passing your time, is it ? ”

He turned from her to Franz Humbert, who, he saw, was still looking as if he thought she must be an intruder.

“ So, soh ! Franz,—you won't believe your own eyes won't you ? ” he said, going up to him, and laying his hand on his arm.

There was a short pause, and then the violinist spoke.

“ Have you—have you married a wife, Sinclair ? ” he asked, in an awed undertone.

He still doggedly rejected the idea, that this lady was what she had said she was.

“No, no,—she’s my sister, Franz,” replied the doctor. “You’ve forgotten, old man,—I told you a little time ago that perhaps—perhaps one day I should bring a relation to my house. Too much music, Franz—it makes you forget.—Come, you must apologise to Claire for not believing her.”

Impassively the violinist walked to the doorway, where Claire was still standing.

“A mistake—a mistake,” he muttered; “I had forgotten.”

Then, for the first time, he looked at the doctor’s sister. Before he had seen that someone was in the room whom he thought shouldn’t be there, and so, scarcely regarding her, he had told her to go. But now his vision was cleared, and he saw before him a face such as he had often dreamed of, when he and his brother violin had been communing together.

“Come to the window,” he said, in his quick, unceremonious way, “I want more—more light.”

And before she knew what he was doing,

he had seized her hand and led her to the window.

Marcus Sinclair looked apprehensively at him. He didn't mind this man's queer ways and manners to himself, but it was a very different thing when they were seen in connection with his sister. So, with a half-frown on his dark face, he also drew nearer to the light.

He needn't have feared.

The violinist had withdrawn his hand from Claire's, and was now regarding her with a gentle and reverent gaze.

"He is only looking at her as if she were some kind of a picture," thought the doctor to himself, as the frown died off his face. "He scarcely knows that she is real, and she—she is thinking of his music, not of him."

Are these things possible in real life? Could the violinist gaze upon Claire Sinclair, and think to himself that he was looking on a picture—a dream-face—a phantasia of his softest melodies? Yes,—it was possible for him, perhaps also for her; but for many people,—those who think that half life's duty

is to crush and stamp out their God-given imaginations, it would have been impossible.

“It is a beautiful face,” said the violinist, dreamily, as he looked into the earnest brown eyes, and saw the questioning, straightforward look, that was so strangely child-like. “I would like to look at it a long time, and play to it, and see—see if it couldn’t be real.”

Ah! but the face *was* real, and over it swept a burning colour, as with a quick gesture it turned from him.

“Marc, tell him to go,” Claire faltered; “he is a strange man. But his music—his music, Marc, was so—so wonderful. Whose face was he speaking of? Was it a picture he saw? Tell me, Marc,—he wasn’t speaking of mine, for—for I—I am not beautiful.”

She paused, trembling with emotion, and turned again to look at the violinist.

But Franz Humbert had caught up his instrument and left the room. She and her brother were alone.



## CHAPTER VI.

### HER IDOL.

A FEW uneventful days passed by.

Claire Sinclair began to feel herself quite settled in her brother's house. The uncongenial, loveless life of her father's house seemed to her, as something that she must have lived in months, even years ago,—so distant, so far removed from her did it now appear.

Fortunately, most human beings possess this happy faculty,—not exactly of forgetting what has gone before, but of letting the knowledge of it slip by, only recalling it at intervals, when some word or event seems to strike into it and bring it forcibly back. It is a beneficent thing that it is so ; for, so often is it that the Past holds much that is disagreeable and painful, much that makes us wonder how it were possible that we should have been able to pass through it, and yet be

living in the Present as we are now doing. And not only a bare existing in the Present, but an actual and true enjoyment of the existence, a revelling in it, a drinking in new life, and power and thought with it. It is not that we are shallow,—frivolous,—superficial; it is not that we do not suffer deeply; it is not that, at times, living,—breathing,—thinking,—are not a terrible agony to us; it is not that we *imagine* that we feel and yet do not. No;—all that has gone by has been a giant reality. It is no dream, no nightmare, this misty Past of ours. But, the Omnipotent Wisdom that thought of and devised these strange, susceptible natures, these workings of immortal souls,—knew what was best for the mysterious growth of the Infinite. He knew of man's frailty, of the seeds of Death that were in the Life, of the immutable strength that could only be perfected in weakness. He gave to man,—Memory, Recollection, Retention—God-like gifts, Divine presentations. But because they were given to men and not to gods, to fallen natures, not to infallible beings,—therefore he ordained that the Hand of Time should step in and

lend a haze to the full realization of these gifts. Thus, men have the power to look back into the dark Sanctuary of Sorrow and Suffering, without tears, without anguish—aye, still further, after a while, even to press the memories of these to their hearts, and to cherish and love them.

It could scarcely be said, that Claire did not miss all the luxuries and grandeur of her father's house; she did, but each time she felt the loss it was coupled with a strong sensation of pleasure. Her temperament was one that was weighed down and oppressed by conventionalities. She felt trammelled by them. She liked doing things for herself and for others, when and how she fancied; and hated the stiff and formal waiting for all to be done precisely in the right way, at the right time, and by the right person.

Those who feel the pinch of poverty, who regard with dissatisfaction their plain furniture and small rooms, who grumble at having to do so much for themselves, and at having so few attendants to wait on them,—seldom think that those rich and opulent ones in their grand houses, whom they envy, would

at times give anything to strip themselves of their appurtenances, get rid of the empty pageantries that hem them in, and live for a short while in a little home, with true love, and with the pleasure—yes, the *pleasure*—of doing and working for themselves and for those around them.

“I like thinking and planning,” Claire Sinclair said to her brother, as he was explaining to her, that though his income was steadily on the increase, still it would require careful and economical management, at first, to arrange all as it should be. “And I know I am very ignorant about all household matters, or anything to do with money. Still, you see,—I might ask you about everything.”

The young doctor's grave face relaxed somewhat, at his sister's concluding sentence. She evidently had such perfect trust in him and in his knowledge, that she thought that by consulting him, everything must necessarily then go right.

Women have such a strange facility in believing, that the man they love and reverence is infallible,—his wisdom all wise,—



his knowledge all sufficient,—his judgment incapable of error. At least, many of them have this strong faith and trust when they are young. It seems to die away when they get older, either because they discover that they love themselves and their own opinions and judgments better than anything or anybody else, or they find their confidence rudely shaken and deceived.

“Well, I’m not much of a hand myself at keeping accounts, or knowing the costs or expenses of things,” replied Marc, “but if you like to tell me about any of the difficulties, I daresay we might manage to find some way out of them. Only,—do not talk to me about them when I am busy.”

“Of course I shan’t, Marc,” said Claire, flushing as she spoke. “I’m not going to be a bother to you. I shall be able to see when you are very occupied and want to be quiet, or when you have nothing particular to do and won’t mind my talking to you.”

“What a good little sister you are going to be, Claire,” he said gently, as he looked at her, just then, serious face.

He wondered vaguely whether it were pos-

sible for two people to live together in perfect harmony. Whether the different tastes, inclinations, and opinions must not always be clashing. Whether, even, the very presence of this dearly-loved sister would not, sometimes, in his darkest hours irritate him,—however sweet and sympathetic it were. For Marcus Sinclair had fierce and restive moods; times, when the sight of his fellow human beings was hateful to him, and the sound of their voices maddening. These were the hours when he would have given up years of his life, if he could but grasp hold of a religion—of a faith—of a knowledge. When his mind would reel, as it saw nothing before it but darkness, and nothing behind it but night. He cried out for a God, but could hear no answer, for, even as he called, he closed his ears and bound in his soul with his dogged unbelief. In his moody bitterness he would level men down to the beasts of the field; he would deny the existence of a soul; he would narrow life within the limits of the finite. He had told Claire on the first evening of her arrival that he distrusted most men—that he was a hard and merciless cynic. He had

spoken truly of himself in one way, for his isolation, his reserve, the very sensitiveness of his nature, had combined to make him suspicious of those around him, and ever ready to judge their ways and actions from a low standpoint. He seldom praised or expressed approval; he hated to hear other men doing so; for, he argued, the main ambition and object of all men and women were to get praise, to win glory, to feed and satiate their self-love. And this,—he considered contemptible. Better never to do a kind action at all, better never to accomplish a thing well, better never to rise above other men by close industry and hard toil, than to do it in the spirit of competition, or for the desire of receiving praise. For, to what did it all lead,—and what did it all mean? Nothing; it was empty, hollow, a simulacrum. Vanity of vanities! With a turn of the wind it would be all gone, and but the shadow of a mocking memory remain!

Yet, like other wiser, further-sighted men, Marcus Sinclair, though he could expose, condemn, and pull to pieces, though he could

point out that men's aims were petty, their motives small, and their desires perishable,—still was unable, or, more truly, perhaps, was unequal, to the higher task of proposing, expanding, and building up. So many in the world are content to say, with all sincerity and earnestness, “These things ought not so to be;” so few advance to the declaration of “Thus and thus should it be;” and fewer still strengthen the unveiling and wording of their ideas and conclusions, by themselves *living up* to what they have set forth. True, natural instinct and, perhaps, cultured tastes, give men the ability to *see* that what is, is not as it should be. Little labour of thought is required for this. It is not hard to condemn; it is not difficult to expose errors that, in themselves, are palpable, to all whose eyes are not blinded. But it requires penetrating insight to propound and to reconstruct. Men who do this have need to concentrate their keenest intellectual powers, and to press on in much patience and with hard toil. They find as they advance theories, that the limited methods of practice hem them in on every side, and often make mock of what has



cost them much arduous effort. Yet even these men,—though they are great, in that they not only attack and denounce prevailing abuses, but also suggest improvements and shew forth the ways and the means by which they can be carried out,—often, aye, almost universally, lack the crowning virtue of true greatness. They will propose, but they will not practice; they will unveil high ideas and noble possibilities, but they will not themselves live up to them, *though* time after time they reiterate their firm belief, in the feasibility of what they assert. For,—to practice, to live up to theory, to show forth in daily life the grandness of what they preach, requires *more* than penetrating insight or intellectual power. In one word—a full comprehensive, limitless word, it requires—Self-Sacrifice.

And men like *not* Self-Sacrifice !

Marcus Sinclair could pull down, but he could not reconstruct. Strongly he felt that his maxim—"Work for work's sake"—was not, by any means, the full and ultimate endeavour of life. He was conscious that he was not satisfied with this, and that, though

unacknowledged, his motives for working were oftentimes widely opposed to it. The science he studied was a deep and all-absorbing one, and he took keen and real pleasure in it. But, honestly, he knew it was not only for science's sake that he laboured. There had been a stronger incentive for this, impelling him onward. It was not the thought of winning glory and renown; it was not even the higher motive, of being the means of further relieving the sum of human suffering; it was not for the Honour and Glory of God,—for Sinclair hardly acknowledged the existence of a God. But it was for a single deep affection—the continual craving and preparing for the presence and companionship of one, who was dearer to him than all else besides—that had made him struggle upward, surmount difficulties, and press forward in the path of fame. The pleasure of searching and delving in the exhaustless mines of knowledge for knowledge's sake, was great; but it sank into insignificance before the complete and boundless happiness, of doing it for the sake of love. For “a man's heart is king over his intellect, and can lead

him on to do and suffer, where his intellect is powerless to move him."

And yet—Dr. Sinclair preferred people thinking him a taciturn, gloomy, cynical man, working only for work's sake, than that they should know that he hated himself for condemning and distrusting his fellow man; that he had shelled himself in in an exterior of hardness, because he was acutely sensitive; and that his medical researches were not the whole occupiers of his thoughts.

—The conversation between Claire and her brother wandered off, after awhile, from accounts and economies to the subject of Mrs. Forrester. Claire had naturally told him, some days previously, of her encounter with this lady. He had then seemed rather disturbed and put out, as she lightly related what had passed between them. But he had said little besides,—

"I don't like her, Claire; and I don't wish you to become friends with her. She will work mischief—mischief, perhaps, even—between us."

But further than this he had not spoken. Claire had wished to ask him what he meant,

and why he disliked Mrs. Forrester; but she had not dared, for she saw by his face that he was even more annoyed than his words expressed. Now, however, he himself broached the topic, and she was glad of it. There is always a certain sense of uncomfortableness, when anyone studiously avoids speaking on some matter, without there being for it any apparent, or known, reason.

He began abruptly, in his peculiar, stern tones, which had become customary with him, whenever he was conversing upon some subject that did not exactly please him, or upon which he had difficulty in expressing what he instinctively felt.

“Mrs. Forrester has not been here again, Claire?” he asked, making a negative statement as he put the question.

“No, Marc,—and I’m glad she hasn’t.”

“Why are you glad?—Who has been telling you anything about her?—Who have you been talking to?”

He put the questions hastily, with a touch of suspicion in his voice.

Claire detected it. Notwithstanding the



hard experiences of her father's house, she was still acutely sensitive to every change in manner, voice, expression. She shrank, as a child would, from anything that meant more than the actual words conveyed.

"Nobody, Marc," she said, nervously, twisting and untwisting her fingers while she spoke. "Why do you ask me? You know I tell you everything that happens while you are out. I only said I was glad she hadn't been to call, because the other day, when I spoke of her, you said you didn't like her."

"Oh!"

He didn't mean anything by his monosyllabic expression, except that he was half-ashamed of himself, for having allowed the ghost of a suspicion to enter his mind. But it made the hot blood rush to Claire's face, and her delicate lips droop, as she heard it; for, she did not know what was passing in his mind, and the involuntary ejaculation might mean anything. She did not, however, speak, but waited for him to continue. Former experiences had taught her that it is often best to be silent and wait. Insisting

upon explanations, upon often imaginary points, brings no balm.

"She called me '*close*,' Claire," he went on, not looking at her, but down at his foot, as it clumsily traced the pattern of the carpet, "and said it was strange I had never spoken of my relations?"

"Yes, but —"

"She would like to know all about me," he continued, unmindful of her, while his voice hardened, and his heavy, arched brows contracted; "she would be pleased to hear that I was turned out of my father's house like a dog,—or worse than a dog;—that I belong to a family with an old and well-known name, which I am not worthy to—or, rather, would *scorn* to bear. She would love to re-enact, for the benefit of Abbeyslea, that scene of years ago—to let it pass from house to house, till exaggeration, and—and this world's charity had blackened me with criminal designs, and —"

"Marc!"

She did not mean to interrupt him, but his name escaped from her lips against her will.

Often the thought crossed her, that her

brother was very different to what he used to be. This time, it struck her with greater force. He used sometimes, she remembered, to be quick and fiery, but never bitter like this. His face had never looked forbidding as it now did.

He paused a moment and gazed across at her, but he was too occupied with his own thoughts, to notice the trouble and fear in her eyes. He was not naturally a selfish man, but this was one of his dark days, when everybody and everything was distorted by his grim and sickly fancy. Neither was he naturally bitter, but the circumstances of his life had tended to make him different from what Nature would have had him be.

“You don’t know what she is like,” he said, lowering his voice, but still speaking moodily; “women who don’t do good—and there are many enough of them—do a great deal of harm—far more than men do. They go about amongst all their friends, relations, acquaintances,—and talk, and lie, and take away people’s characters. They don’t always say outright what they think and mean, because they don’t exactly know,—but they

insinuate, which is ten times as bad, for—insinuations can be twisted into anything, and people always twist into evil if they can.”

“And what about the men, Marc? They are the lords of creation,—couldn’t they stop all this if they chose?” asked Claire, thinking how clever her brother was to speak and see things as he did.

For herself, she never thought much about the why and the wherefore of what puzzled her. She only wondered, and thought when she was older, she would perhaps come to understand.

“Oh! the men, Claire,” answered he, recklessly; “did I say they were any better than the women? Well, I was wrong. All they say in their houses is ‘Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die.’—In work, they hasten forward,—press others down,—bear in with sharp and hard practices,—trample, and —”

He stopped short.

It was not many days ago that, as he had looked into his sister’s earnest, child-like face, with its touch of suffering and pain upon it, he had vowed to himself that, from



henceforward, he would guard it from all that would hurt it. He had felt that he hated those who had not cherished and loved her, and kept her untouched by the rough and hard ways of the world. And yet, here was he, already forgetting his self-imposed trust, and opening out and enlarging to her the ways of this same untrue world—seen, as he honestly knew, *not* from the highest or most liberal vantage ground.

Hastily he sought to pull himself together again, and to set a seal upon the dark thoughts and experiences which were assailing him. Why should his sister know what he himself knew? Why should he roughly open her eyes to see as he saw? Why not let them open naturally, to see as her purer, sweeter nature would instinctively lead her, after awhile, to see?

Marcus Sinclair was a proud man, but, in his own way, he was also high-minded. He did not belong to the class of little-minded men, who possess that false pride which prevents them ever owning themselves—even to themselves—in the wrong. So he did the simplest and most straightforward

thing he could do at that moment, hoping to dispel the effect of what he had just said.

“ Claire, little sister,” he said, gently, “ come here—come close to me.”

In a moment she was at his side, with that light of love and trust shining in her brown eyes, which had the power at times of making them appear so strangely beautiful.

“ Claire, dear,” he went on, hesitating slightly as he spoke, for it cost him a great effort, “ you must not always think that what I think is right, and you must not always hold that what I do is the best, because, little sister, I judge hardly and crookedly, and sometimes I am ashamed of what I think and say. And so—I would not have you think as I do ; no,—no, Claire. You must never, never think what I think—*never*.”

He spoke gravely, almost authoritatively. He meant every word that he said. But he was scarcely prepared for the low, passionate answer he received.

“ Marc, I shan't be able to help myself. I can't do what you ask ; I *must* believe you. I *must* think that what you say is right, and

what you do is the best. You are *my idol*, and my idol is—is *perfect* to me.”

She also meant what she said. This faulty, imperfect man—her brother—was perfect to her. He had been her idol in childhood, and now, as a woman, he was still her idol—believed in and worshipped. With her “love was blind,” *then*.

Her words seemed to the young doctor as bitterest irony, though he knew they were not intended to be such. He tried to answer back lightly, and to laugh at the very idea of such a notion.

“Your idol—perfect—Claire?” he said, with forced gaiety in his tones, while he rose from his chair. “I should say he was about the most imperfect idol that ever existed. Wait a few years—wait—you will find that you will have another idol then, for you will marry, Claire, and then—then your idol will be your husband.”

“But I am never going to marry,” said Claire, seriously and decidedly. “I am always going to live with you, and I am always going to love you the best.”

“And what if *I* marry, Claire?”

“But you won’t, Marc.”

She asserted this as if she felt convinced of what she was saying. And he did not contradict her, though he wondered why she should say it.

With a sigh, he turned the conversation once again to its former course.

“Claire, I want you to remember this,” he said, with that grave intonation of his deep voice which had the power of marking and impressing his words; “the Past *is* passed. Our family history is not anything to you or me now,—it is gone by. Neither is it anything to anyone else. If people, such as Mrs. Forrester and others, seek to inquire into it,—if they want to know the how and the why of this or that,—remember that I tell you plainly now, I do not wish it known, neither for your sake, nor my own, nor—nor for his—your father’s, I mean. Never tell a lie about it,—never invent excuses, but simply and firmly shew that you and I are one in this matter. Do you see what I mean?”

“Yes, I think I do. It will be difficult, but —”



She paused, hesitating a moment, then seemed to take courage and went on —

“Supposing, Marc, I should make a mistake,—supposing I should forget, because I’m not clever and thoughtful like you are,—may I—may I—tell you at once about it?”

He smiled at the frank request. So few like to tell when they have made a mistake; so few petition that they may be allowed to confess an error at once.

He looked gently down at her upturned, earnest face, and then slowly lowered his head and kissed her smooth forehead. And that was his answer to what she had asked him.

Then he said —

“Run and fetch your hat, Claire,—we’ll take a stroll. I think we are too serious for such young people; we ought to be enjoying life, not talking anxiously over it, as if we knew all about it. Get a shawl, or jacket, or something, too, for—I’m not going to work to-night, so we’ll stay out till it’s dark and enjoy ourselves.”

Possibly companionship would shorten

Marcus Sinclair's dark moods, or, in time, drive them away altogether. For this was the evening of a day, when he had felt fierce and antagonistic to everybody and everything. Yet—he was proposing “enjoying” himself.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE GREAT “BAIRN-LOVER.”

CLAIRE ran to fetch her hat and her shawl, and then, with the snatches of a song on her lips and a light in her heart, she joined her brother in the hall.

“I’m too happy to talk,” she said, as they closed the garden-gate behind them,—“besides,—listen!—everything’s music!”

Her last words were scarcely grammatical, still,—they were decidedly expressive. For the evening was one of those Spring evenings, when April is merging into May, and all Nature seems bursting forth into Songs of Thanksgiving and Praise.

The sweet, tremulous notes of the thrush and the blackbird, sounded rich and clear and harmonious in the soft-stirring air; while lower,—as subdued accompaniment,—came the twitterings and warblings of the humbler hedge-sparrows, the tit-mice, and

the wrens, as they coyly wooed their silent mates. Softer, dreamier, lower still, to those who cared to listen, could be heard the murmur and buzz of tiny insects; and now and again the hum of some early bee, as, mad and bustling in its pride at being first among the flowers, it flits here and there unmindful of the cold, moist nights that yet will be, and which will chill it,—soft, velvet thing, only fit for full summer's gentle caress!

At no time is the scent of the flowers so sweet, so fragrant, as on these fair Spring evenings, when the delicate petals still tremble, glistening with the diamond rain-drops, that the vapouring clouds have, from time to time, during the day dropped down upon them. The meadows with their tender, new-growing grass are patched white with plots of daisies, or down by the river bank look golden with luxuriant marigolds. And close beneath the budding hedges, hide the scented violets and pale primroses—nearly over now, but still sweet, still fragrant.

Far away lay the hills, all wood begirt; with the new green of the birch and larches,



shining out emerald and silver against the red and amber of the later-sprouting oaks. Nothing was silent;—all was astir with the breath and the throb of awakened life. The lowing of the kine, the bleating of the lambs, the murmuring and rippling of the flowing river, the stirring of the air in the trees, the hum of the insects, the song of the birds, made music in everything—music, music everywhere.

Once, long ago, it was strangely told, there lived a child, who was the *child of Nature*. Day and night he heard the sound of low, sweet singing, borne up from the beautiful earth on the wings of the wind. But though he listened long and earnestly, he could hear no words to the Song. At length, weary of waiting, he smiled at his loved companions,—at the birds and the insects, the flowers and the trees and the rivers, and asked,—“What are you always singing? I *cannot* hear the Words.” And they answered, sadly,—“We do not know the Words ourselves,—we are waiting for the ‘Children of the Earth’ to sing them; *then* the melody will be complete, but now it is but a ‘*Song without Words.*’ ”—

Alas ! it is still a Song without Words. The Children of Earth are hastening on and on to learn all, to know all, except *one* thing. They will not stop to learn the Words of the Song, and so they cannot sing it. But Nature, beautiful melodious Nature, is singing on, still waiting for those Words that *must* rise from the Children of Earth, before the Song can be complete.

—The brother and sister wandered on, out of the broad highway into the narrow lanes. Claire had said she was too happy to talk, but, for all that, at times she chatted unthinkingly on, and mingled her merry laugh with the music of all around. The exuberance of her high spirits was infectious, for once,—twice,—the tall, gloomy-faced young doctor, whom the people of Abbeyslea spoke of as seldom even smiling, laughed too,—a deep, hearty laugh, which made him even wonder at himself, so strange, so foreign was it to him. He felt almost as though he were a boy again, full of wild hopes and mad desires ; building castles in the air, knowing scarcely what he felt or thought, conscious only that the shadows of life were scattering fast, and

that broad gleams of sunlight were flashing across his pathway.

"We have left Abbeyslea far behind us," he said, as for a moment they stopped to take breath at the summit of a hill, up which they had hurried; "but look, Claire,—just down on this side, stands the furthest outlying house of the parish—quite separate from the rest, you see.—Do you know, I like this house almost better than any other."

"Why?—I don't think it is very pretty. Ours is a much nicer built one than that one, though, of course, our grounds are not so large or countrified."

Women *love* to compare with the all-absorbing "ours." Nothing becomes so thoroughly interesting to them as when, by any way whatsoever, they can make this standard comparison.

"I scarcely meant that I liked the actual house,—but I like the people who live in it, the little I know of them, better than any others in Abbeyslea. They are regular good sort—no nonsense about them,—comparatively newcomers, you see, and so—not yet fully initiated into—into —"

“What’s their name?” interrupted Claire, not anxious to hear what they were not initiated into, as she did not exactly know what the word meant.

“Oh, their name’s—Trevor—Mr. and Mrs. Trevor and two children. I had a good deal to do with the little girl about a year ago—such a delicate, highly-strung nervous child. I was obliged to order her off to the sea for six months or so, for her life was hanging on a very slender thread. She’s come back now much stronger and—better, but I doubt—I doubt much if she will ever live to grow up.”

He spoke abstractedly, and a slight shadow passed over his face, as still he remained standing, looking down at the house.

Suddenly, a thought struck him.

“Claire,—I should like you to know Mrs. Trevor,” he said, abruptly,—“we will go in there now. I have, once or twice, before in the evenings, and I know she will give you a welcome.”

He moved on as he spoke.

“See,—if we go through this gate,” he continued, “and pass down that steep meadow, we shall get into a side-pathway,



leading through the garden. We shall be trespassing,—for this is Trevor's private short-cut, but I don't think he will mind."

Claire half wished that their way had not led them in this direction, for she would rather have strayed on and on in her brother's company, than to have lessened the time with him by an evening call. However,—he wished it, and therefore it was best.

"They're not grand people, I hope,—are they, Marc?" she asked, thinking how nervous she should feel, when they were shown inside, "and there won't be anyone else except themselves, will there?"

"No, not grand at all, Claire,—very homely people," he replied, quickly, as, having reached the bottom of the hill, they passed through a little gate, and almost directly arrived at the front door. "I don't expect there will be anyone here, except,—perhaps, —— John Forrester. He often comes here, when his wife doesn't want him at home, I believe. Possibly, also—"

At this point, he was interrupted by their summons at the bell being answered, and the door opened.

Mrs. Trevor was at home.

As they entered the hall, they heard,—issuing from a room at the further end of it, the sound of children's voices and the bass *cannonading*—it could not otherwise be described—of a man's laughter.

“What a laugh!” exclaimed Claire, beneath her breath, to her brother. “Is it Mr. Trevor's?”

“No,—John's,—I should know his laugh anywhere. Besides,—he evidently has the children with him now, so there will be no stopping it.”

Another cannonade of laughter, and children's shouts of delight.

Claire's face twitched all over. It was almost impossible to hear such a laugh and not laugh too.

As the servant turned the handle of the drawing-room door, the shouts partially ceased, and instead, a gentle voice was heard, saying—

“Hush, children, hush! There's someone being shown in. Mr. Forrester, you really are quite turning the children's heads!—Enid,—Robin,—try to be steady!”

Steady?—How *could* the children be steady, when the great, big-statured ‘lover of children,’ — John Forrester, — was appearing, enveloped in a large tiger-skin, from beneath the folds of the bow-window curtains,—ready to pounce upon them at any moment?—And he was deaf to Mrs. Trevor’s entreaties. There was a low roar, the sound of children’s treble voices, and the pattering of hasty little feet across the room, and — as Dr. Sinclair entered at the door—a little flax-haired girl, with rumpled frock and excited eyes, almost fell against him, in her haste to get away from the advancing “tiger.”

The fair, delicate-looking child coloured crimson, as she glanced timidly up, and saw her tall doctor’s dark face.

“So sorry,” she murmured, bashfully,—“thought it was Father coming in, and I knew he’d hide me.”

Before Sinclair could reply, Mrs. Trevor had advanced to meet them.

“Oh! what will you think, Dr. Sinclair, of this kind of bear-garden we have here?” she said, apologetically, “but the children have been looking forward to this game all the

day, because they knew our kind friend, Mr. Forrester, was coming this evening. And—”

“My sister,” he said, quickly; “I have brought her in to see you, Mrs. Trevor;—she is living with me now,—and I want her to know you.”

He said the words clumsily, in cold, abrupt tones. But it mattered not. He was speaking to a woman who had true instinct, ready sympathy, and a kind heart. And, though, comparatively, she knew little of Marcus Sinclair, with that wide charity which characterizes so few, she knew *not* the worst part of him, but the best. She had penetrated beneath the hard outer crust of proud reserve, and had seen that the nature that lay beneath was a fine one. Thus, now, she received simply what he said, and took no note of the way in which he said it.

“I am very pleased to see you,” she said, in her kind, gentle voice, holding out her hand to Claire as she spoke; “I had heard of your arrival, and was coming soon to call on you. But I am so glad Dr. Sinclair hasn’t waited for that, and has brought you to see me, first.”



"Thank you," said Claire, warmly, her shyness vanishing as she looked at the quiet, pleasant face close to hers, "I think—I mean—I'm glad too, though —"

She was going on to say, that before she had come in, she had not wished to come; for she was singularly frank and open, and did not like anyone to think differently, from what was actually the case.

But she would have scarcely heard herself, even if she had continued speaking, for the great bass voice that belonged to the great bass laugh, was filling up the room, and nothing else could be heard.

"How d' you do, Sinclair.—Just caught me—eh! Ha, ha—exciting your little patient too much, you'll say? But,—look here, you doctors don't always recommend the best remedies,—you think your medicines and stuffs are wanted, when nine times out of ten, it's a game of play that will set matters to rights with the children, and—and with the grown up children too, I believe. Take my advice, Sinclair,—give up your nasty draughts and physics, and take to making your patients laugh instead,—they'll get well

far quicker, and it's a much wholesomer way of getting better. Now,—just look at my little friend, Enid,—did *you* ever manage to put such a fine colour in her —”

“My little patient coloured up because she nearly knocked me over,” interrupted the doctor, saying the words gravely, but smiling at the child, as she stood with her little hand hidden in John Forrester's large one, and her face upturned to his.

“Well,—well, that only carries out the truth of what I was saying,” went on the great voice again; “let the children knock you down if they want to, and have a good laugh over it, and then they'll feel quite well, —won't you, little one?” he added, bending down to the flaxen-haired child at his side,—“But where's Robin?—I can't see him.”

“He's hiding,” whispered the little girl, standing on tip-toe to tell the secret; “look, —he's over there,—he's peeping.”

“Mr. Forrester, I want to introduce you to —”

But the great man was already half-way across the room, in search of the missing Robin.

"He'll spoil my children,—he's too good to them," said Mrs. Trevor, more to herself than to her visitors.

There was a short scuffle in the curtains,—several cannons of laughter, with high, childish shrieks, and then Robin,—a little fair boy of between four and five years,—was borne in triumph on the great, broad shoulders, back to where the others were still standing.

"Now, Mrs. Trevor, I'm ready to be introduced," said Mrs. Forrester's husband,—not, however, waiting for her to speak, but holding out his hand to Claire, and smiling down at her as he did so.

Claire thought she had never seen such a great kind face before. No wonder the children loved it. No wonder his laugh was loud and hearty, and his voice deep and true, when the kind eyes were smiling and twinkling, and the face,—with its brown beard and straight, untidy hair—was strong, and plain, and manly, but, at the same time, tender as a woman's.

Robin, from his safe position on high, watched Claire's face as she looked up; and,

with a child's quick perception, he saw the light and smile that passed over it. A thought entered his little mind, which, quick as lightning, was put into words. Bending down from the broad shoulders on which he was perched, with perfect trust that the arm that held him there would prevent his falling, —he touched Claire's cheek confidently with one of his chubby hands, and asked, in his broken, baby language —

“Doesn't you *love* him? Enie and me does, and Muvver says he's—he's —”

“Never mind now, Robin,” said Robin's mother, thinking how sweet were her boy-baby's words, yet at the same time seeing, that the innocent prattle must be rather awkward in its straightforward simplicity, to her visitors than otherwise; “it's time for Mother's son to go to sleep,—so he must give his kind friend a hug, and then get down and —”

“Muvver,—I 'member now,” broke in the little boy triumphantly, pulling himself back to his former position, by clutching hold of Mr. Forrester's hair; “you says Mr. Fowwest are Wobbin's bestest fwient —”



"'Tisn't bestest, it's *best*, Robin," put in Enid, with her superior knowledge of grammar, shaking back her hair from her hot face, as she looked reprovably up; "and 'tisn't *are*, it's *is*;—and you shouldn't only say—'Robin's best friend,' but—'Enid's' too."

"Both to both bestest," said the little boy, sweetly, putting his sturdy arms tightly round his great friend's neck; "but—Wobbin gives the huggest of all!"

"You certainly do, little man,—but I hope when you get bigger, that you won't clutch hold so fast, or I shall have neither hair nor beard left," exclaimed Mr. Forrester, laughing, as he unclasped the clinging baby hands, and then, with a deft turn, brought the little boys safely down on the ground near his mother.

"Poor Mr. Forrester," said the mother; "say you're sorry, Robin."

"Me's sowwy not to hug more longer," said Robin, obediently,—as he thought,—and opening his round blue eyes wide, at the laugh that followed his words.

"Mayn't he just stay till Father comes in?" pleaded Enid, "he's been so good all

day, and—he loves to ride up to bed on Father's back."

This delicate, old-fashioned little girl, was strangely motherly to her small brother. She watched him, and took care of him, and petitioned for him, and marked his quaint sayings, and devoted herself to him. Robin was first in everything; she wanted no attention to herself, if only everyone would admire him, and love him, and be kind to him, and see how good he was, and how clever he was growing. It was the germ, in its first sweet freshness, of that unselfish and all-enduring devotion, that most girls bestow freely and fully upon their schoolboy brothers; who come home from their hard training at school, to be petted and spoiled and waited on,—till they, themselves, are as kings in their homes, and accept all favours and kindnesses and 'slavings,' as their bounden rights. This is why, perhaps, when they get older, that Carlyle advocates — "the *barrelling* of all young men from a certain age to a certain age,"—that they may get rid of all claim upon *rights*, before they start out in a world that only offers them—*duties*.

—As Enid finished speaking, Robin raised his chubby hand, and that look of intent and all-absorbed listening, that can only be seen on a little child's face, with its wonderful power of expression,—came over his ; and made the mother stay her words a moment, and listen also.

“It's Farder !” whispered the little fellow, in an awestruck tone, as if he had never listened before to the well-known step. “Muvver,—Wobbin may go ?”

Every evening, when he heard his father's step, he asked to go and meet him ; and he knew he might,—but still he asked, because he liked doing what “Muvver said yes to,” better than doing anything without asking her.

Stepping from side to side, in earnest endeavour to tread on tip-toe, and not over-balance himself as he did so, he reached the half-closed door.

“Hush !” he turned to say, in a child's whisper, which is always louder than its ordinary talk.

Then he disappeared, and the pattering of unsteady little feet was heard on the tiled floor of the hall.

“ I think Father must have got somebody with him,” said Enid, still listening. “ Robin hasn’t jumped yet, or called out.”

Enid was right ; Mr. Trevor had someone with him, and there was no jump and no call.

Robin had scarcely got halfway across the hall when,—seeing a stranger talking to his father,—he stopped a moment and looked in doubt at him ; then, a fit of shyness seized him, and with quick, uncertain steps he pattered back to the drawing-room.

“ There’s a man with wellow hair and a big penthil box,” he whimpered, hiding his face in his mother’s lap ; “ and—and—poor Wobbin can’t go pick—pick-a-back.”

“ Never mind, we’ll all go pick-a-back together,” said the great bass voice of Robin’s friend. “ Come, Enid,—there’s room for both ;—and Father will come and kiss you, when you are tucked up safe in your cots.”

John Forrester said this in his usual hearty tones, as he steadied the children on his broad back. But, he said something else, too, which the mother of Enid and Robin alone heard, and which was not even meant for her ears.



"Lucky man!" he growled, beneath his breath, "to have bairns of his own."

For,—the lover of children, with his great heart and kind face, had no bairns of his own. The God of Heaven had denied him the desire of his heart.

He was a childless man.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE CHILD AND THE MUSIC.

THE gentleman with "wellow hair and the big penthil box," was Franz Humbert with his violin-case.

He had been on his way to the old Parish Church, there to revel in the music of his loved companion, when he was met by Mr. Trevor, who had persuaded him to change his intention, and come, instead, to spend the evening at his home.

The two men were not well acquainted; but, as Mr. Trevor saw the figure of the eccentric violinist, coming along in its peculiar absorbed way, he thought of his own bright home, his sweet-faced wife, his merry bairns,—and determined to bring the solitary, soliloquizing violinist, for a time, out of the visionary world in which he lived, into a warmer and healthier atmosphere. He had never asked him in before, or cared to know

him further than to nod in a friendly way, or make some short remark when he happened to meet him. But that spring evening must have brought with it a softening and genial influence, for he felt his rather narrow heart—narrow because it contained only a love for and interest in just the few, and had no all-encompassing care for humanity in general—expand with the wish that other men could be as happy as he was. It seemed to him, just then, that the life of Franz Humbert, with its intangible aspirations, was the personification of all that would make a man thoroughly miserable. Thus, without knowing the reason why he did it, or why it mattered to him whether the violinist were happy or no,—he pressed him to give up his pre-determined intention of going to the Parish Church, and accompany him instead to his own bright home, where he would have other listeners to his melodies, than crumbling walls and cold, dark aisles.

As they walked along together, even a casual observer could not fail to note,—by the very build of their figures, their bearing, features, and expression,—that they were

men of two distinctly different types. Arthur Trevor—upright, well-set, with his quick, firm step, his precise manner, his smooth hair, his lined and rather stern face when in repose, his even intonation of voice, the absence of all gesture, and the comparatively little change of expression—was essentially the business man. He could have little or nothing in common with the dreamy musician—trembling in every limb with nervous excitement, the muscles in his face working, his colour coming and going, his thin legs and long feet seeming to dance or skip along, never moving like an ordinary man's, his head and shoulders and arms all gesticulating as he spoke, to lend emphasis to what he was saying. The one stood on firm ground, the other floated in cloud-land. The one lived in the world of practical action, the other in the world of visionary thought. The one had work,—sorrows,—pleasures,—that were realities in life, the other knew of nothing that lay not in the realms of fancy and imagery.

The business man looked upon the *artiste* with a kind of scornful commiseration, think-



ing it would have been better if he had been a woman and not a man. It would have been less peculiar in a woman to be so æsthetic, so nervously susceptible, so capricious, so unpractical, and so—as he summed up his opinion of him, not unkindly, but, as he thought, truly—“*soft*.” Those philosophers who study the different grades of life, and who have given forth their carefully-weighed opinion, that the highest form of life exists in those natures which are most flexible, impressionable, passionate, and least generally understood,—must have been visionaries themselves to have made such a statement. At least, so thought Arthur Trevor, and mostly everyone else who knew anything about wise men’s foolish sayings. For surely, they argue, the highest form of life must be in being manly, and looking like a man, and speaking like a man, and acting like a man,—in short, in being like other men.

Franz Humbert, though he could not understand Arthur Trevor, or, indeed, any of the men with whom he occasionally came in contact, yet did not for that reason despise them. He looked up to them, admired them, and

marvelled at their strange great power of *doing*, when he himself was completely lost in the maze of only *thinking*. At times, when he felt calmer and less excited than usual, he would, in his rapid, emotional way, try to think why it was that all the things that so deeply interested other men, awoke no equivalent feelings in his own heart. Why it was that he had no desire to press forward in the Race of Life ; no earnest wish to win laurels, to outstep other men, and to rush on to some far-off, golden goal, to which they all seemed to be hastening. But he always lost himself in his own thoughts, and came back nearly to the same point from which he had started, namely, that of Wonder ; which, after all, is no mean vantage-ground on which to stand. At least it shows a higher and more liberal mind, than that of a man who never wonders, but only despises and looks down upon what he cannot or, often, does not even take the trouble to understand.

Mrs. Trevor had only come across the violinist twice, since she and her husband had settled in this house on the outskirts of Abbeyslea. The second time she had met

him, had been at an afternoon gathering held at Mrs. Forrester's. Long after that day had passed by, she had felt her heart burn hot within her, as she thought of what she had witnessed there. It was one of those 'afternoons' which, despite the efforts to court all the musical talent of the neighbourhood, would have been exceptionally dull and flat, had it not been for the presence of one unlucky person. And that person, upon this occasion, happened to be—Franz Humbert. Possibly, he ought only to have felt flattered at being the cause for loud, personal whispers, smothered guiltily,—would-be innocent questions, and pointed remarks from the fair sex, as bit by bit they picked him to pieces. But he was not,—he quivered and trembled beneath the petty vein of humour which was brought out especially for his gratification; his head throbbed, his heart seemed to be bursting, his very life being taken, little by little, from him, as he listened to what was *not exactly* meant for him to hear, and saw what was *not exactly* meant for him to see. For, unfortunately, men and women who are somewhat singular

in their ideas and tastes, are always supposed to hear nothing, to see nothing, and, most mistaken of all, to feel nothing. This, apparently, is the only charitable conclusion that could be drawn, to account for what, otherwise, seems a lack of all ordinary courtesy and feeling, in connection with them. Strange is it that women, when they come together in some of these social gatherings, forget that they are supposed to possess tender hearts and deep sympathies!

—As Arthur Trevor arrived with his companion at the door of his house, he gave a half sigh of relief. The thought that his wife was always ready to welcome cordially anyone whom he might bring back with him, was a pleasant one. Further also, he knew that her tact and graciousness had the power of putting even total strangers, after a short while, completely at their ease. He, himself, had found it difficult, in any way, to conform himself in conversation with the erratic violinist, even during the length of their short walk together. But Arthur Trevor had entire trust that, had Franz Humbert been even odder than he was, his wife would



still have been able to make all go smoothly. In everything he looked to her ; she was the queen of his heart and his home, and he held that there was no one in all the broad world to be compared with her.

The violinist entered the room a few paces or so behind Trevor, with a shifty, uncertain step. He wore his usual old velveteen coat, his walking boots which were yellow, and, with his fingers, he clutched hold of a much-squashed grey hat.

If Trevor had brought in anyone else, Sinclair would probably have risen to go ; but, as it turned out to be his next-door neighbour, to whom he was partial, he only looked across at Claire upon his entrance, and smiled.

Claire returned the glance, and, still smiling, looked up at Franz Humbert. They were already on friendly terms, for he now acknowledged her as the doctor's sister, and she regarded him as her brother's friend.

The violinist was looking somewhat hopelessly about him, from side to side. Suddenly, he caught sight of Claire, and, though Mrs. Trevor was at that moment speaking to

him, he made a hasty stride past her, to where the doctor's sister was sitting.

"I have been wanting you," he said, with reproach in his high tenor tones.

"Why?" she asked.

"I wanted to see you," he said, gazing full at her.

"To see me?—What do you mean?" she questioned again, puzzled.

"See you in the Church, playing on the organ, while—while I and he looked and—and thought."

"What a funny man you are!" she said, in her artless way; "I never told you I could play the organ. And,—what can you want to look at?"

"At you."

She took what he said prosaically, for she was becoming accustomed to his queer ways.

"You couldn't play your violin if you looked at me," she said; "people can't do two things at once well."

"We weren't going to play," he answered, querulously, (the "we" meaning him and his violin),—"we were going to look and dream, and be filled with —"

“Come, Humbert,” broke in Arthur Trevor, laughing, “you mustn’t ignore us altogether. Here’s my wife wanting to speak to you, and I am waiting to see something of Miss Sinclair.”

The violinist turned away rather disconsolately. They might have let him finish what he wanted to say, he thought, dropping his hat in his vexation, and treading upon it. But the hat was accustomed to this ; it was always being trod on, or sat upon, and it didn’t make much difference now either to its shape or colour.

Mrs. Trevor laid a soft, friendly hand on his arm, and, speaking in her gentle tones, which always gave the person she spoke to, the idea that she knew of what he was thinking and feeling, and could sympathize with him, she said —

“Mr. Humbert, you will be giving us quite a treat this evening, if you will play to us. My husband is very fond of good music, and —”

“Is he? Do you mean it?” interrupted the violinist, his whole face lighting up with pleasure. “What?—shall we be a company

of music lovers?—Miss Sinclair, and Sinclair, and Mr. Trevor,—and we, delighting in its enchantment! And you—you spoke not of yourself, is—is it possible—can it be?—have you no love for the Muse of music—no transport in it?”

Arthur Trevor looked at his wife. He knew she had no taste for music; that, though she liked fairly well to listen to an ordinary tune on an ordinary instrument,—the weird, fantastic strains that Franz Humbert would indulge in on his violin, were far beyond her power to comprehend or enjoy. But he knew also that, with all his wife's courtesy and graciousness, she never told a lie, not even a *society* one.

She caught his look, as she invariably did, for the husband and wife were one in everything, and always seemed to know of what each was thinking.

“I am not musical,” she said, as she looked into the *artiste's* excited eyes, “but I always like to have music in our home, because it is a pleasure to my husband. So I, also, shall enjoy hearing you play.”

She spoke perfectly truly, for, though



music was no actual pleasure to her, still, as she knew it was to her husband, that, in itself, gave her full power to enjoy it.

And the violinist was satisfied.

“We shall all enjoy together,” he said, laughing gleefully, and running his long, thin fingers through his yellow hair, “and hear songs, and see pictures, and cloud-lands and all—all that is beautiful.”

“Shall I fetch your case?” asked Sinclair, rising as he spoke, for Franz Humbert had, all at once, become engrossed in examining the shape and architecture of the room, in its relation to sound.

“No—yes—I mean—no.—I shall have finished in a moment,” replied the violinist abstractedly, walking to the bow-window and looking closely at the rather heavy curtains that hung there.

Dr. Sinclair disappeared from the room.

“I believe Franz would become quite a rational being,” he thought to himself, “if people would only take him in the right way. I suppose, however, I might say much the same thing of myself—I shouldn’t be the surly, silent stick that I am, if the world

had treated me differently. Ha!—everything seems mismanaged, except perhaps, this household, which is right—rightly balanced, rightly governed—in fact right altogether, strangely enough!”

He looked at the violin case a moment, before he took it up. Franz Humbert was very watchful over this which contained his precious possession, and seldom allowed anyone to touch it.

“Why should a man find such a soul in a mere instrument,—a thing which has no vitality or soul in it?” he thought as he lifted it gently, and began making his way back to the drawing-room.

Just before he reached the door, he felt the sleeve of his coat being timidly pulled. Looking down, he saw that his flaxen-haired little patient, Enid, was walking by his side.

“Haven’t you gone to bed?” he said, surprised to see her again. “I thought you went up with Robin on Mr. Forrester’s back.”

“I don’t go at the same time as Robin,” explained the little maid shyly, for, though she liked her grave doctor, she was afraid of him. “I only pretend to go, and then sometimes I come down again, if Mother likes.”

“But you’re looking a very tired little girl,” said the doctor, noting that the child’s delicate face, so flushed before, was pale and worn-looking now, “you ought to be fast asleep and dreaming.”

“But I can’t go to sleep,” said the little girl, wearily, “I only lie awake, and think, and think.”

“What do you think about?”

“Oh! about Robin, and Father,—and Mother,—and Mr. Forrester—”

Here she stopped, and gave a great sigh.

“And—and sometimes I think of—of you,” she went on timidly, when the sigh was quite finished.

“Of me?” he said, slowly, liking the thought that the child should think of him sometimes.

“Yes,—but nurse says, that I have no business to think of anybody, and that it’s ‘wilful wicked of me to keep on at it.’ But *Mother* says, she knows I don’t do it on purpose, but only because it will come. I think *Mother* must know everything about everything, don’t you?”

Enid had never said such a long sentence to her doctor before. But she seemed less

frightened of him than usual; he wasn't so dark or grave-looking, she thought.

She didn't now wait for him to answer her, but as he moved forward again, she gave a little laugh, and said, as she looked at the violin-case he was carrying —

“Wasn't it funny of Robin to call that a pencil box?—Do you know why he did?”

The doctor shook his head. He was scarcely listening to the child's prattle, but was wondering how it was that Franz hadn't, before now, darted impatiently out to secure his instrument.

“Well,—it's because,” went on the little girl, very intent in her explanation about Robin's words, “Mother gave him a little box to keep a pencil and a pen in, and now everything that looks like a kind of box, he thinks must be a ‘pencil box.’ It doesn't matter how large it is—sometimes he calls his cot a ‘pencil box.’ Isn't he a funny little —”

They had, by this time, arrived inside the drawing-room. Enid stopped short, and looked from her father to her mother, wondering to which she should go.



Mr. Trevor was engaged in talking to Claire; and his wife was seated close to the violinist, who, for once, seemed to be perfectly contented, sitting still and pouring out some of his ideas and feelings to his sympathetic listener.

But as Sinclair entered, bearing the beloved instrument, he sprang up from his seat, exclaiming —

“Ah! my brother,—you have brought him?—Have you told him that we are quite a company of music-lovers together,—and that we shall have sweet,—sweet strains—all that is lovely?”

The violin was already out of its case, and close to the master's ear, as he stooped to tune it.

“My little girlie looks tired,” said Enid's father, taking his little daughter on his knee and kissing her; “doesn't Mother say that she ought to go to rest?”

He wanted to keep her with him, but he thought the all-wise mother knew best, as to whether she ought to stay up or no.

“Father, let me stay just a little bit, if he's going to play. I love music, Father,”

pleaded the child, who never asked a favour for herself, though she was always petitioning for Robin.

The father wavered, and looked across at the mother.

"She looks very white and tired, Arthur;—I think she had better go," said Mrs. Trevor, gently.

But Dr. Sinclair had heard the request, and he saw the clouding tears gathering in the little one's eyes; moreover, he recalled what the child had told him, of lying awake thinking—thinking, and not being able to get to sleep.

He drew near to Mrs. Trevor.

"Let her stay," he said, with a doctor's authority.

And so the mother yielded.

The scrapings ceased, — the violin was ready,—the Master stood erect, ready to begin.

"Father, I *love* music," whispered Enid again, as she lay back in her father's arms, and looked with her large, unnaturally bright eyes up at the violinist's face.

Then it began.

Ah !—the Master must have been strangely inspired to have played as he did ! Every note was sweet and tremulous with delicate feeling. In each graceful movement, the refrain fascinated with its bewildering and appealing charm, and the fulness of joy all unalloyed, was heard in the soft, repeating melodies, as they rose and swelled, then sank into the merest whisper.

The player's flushed face grew calm and quiet ; upon it stole a look of peace. And the listeners stirred not, fearful lest they should break the charm.

But the child lay back in her father's arms, with a glow of colour upon her cheeks, and her eyes growing larger and more brilliant, as still she feverishly watched the player.

Suddenly, a cry broke from her lips.

“ Father, let me go.”

He started, and would have grasped her closer to him. But she was not there. She was standing touching the unseeing player, with both her hands held high above her head.

Another cry came—a strained, unnatural cry.

“Let me feel—let me touch—I must—Mother, *let me—*”

Franz Humbert lowered his violin—not suddenly, not as if he were startled by the interruption, but gently, with a strange light passing over his face.

“It’s a *child-angel* come—come at last,” he murmured, dropping his bow and laying his hand on her flaxen hair.

But the child paid no heed to him. She clutched hold of the still vibrating instrument and pressed it to her burning cheeks. Then,—another faint, struggling cry came, as the slight, little figure swayed.

“I can play—say, oh ! say I —”

But the sentence was never ended. The child was lying stiff and white in her mother’s arms.

Had Dr. Sinclair made a mistake ?



## CHAPTER IX.

LAMBERT ISLAY.

ONE morning, about the middle of June, a gentleman stood at the door of Dr. Sinclair's house, and rang the bell.

He was a handsome-looking man, with a long, fair moustache, curled carefully at the points. His hands were gloved, his clothes faultlessly cut, and his shoes uncomfortably pointed.

"Is Mr. Sinclair in?" he asked, in a drawling voice, as 'Buttons' opened the door.

No, he was not; but he would probably be back from his rounds in half-an-hour or so.

'Buttons' thought to himself, that this grand-looking gentleman must be a stranger to these parts, or he wouldn't have asked for Mr. Sinclair. He would have known that *his* master had passed all "the examins, and got whole certifits of a reel genuwine docter."

The next question of the gentleman, confirmed the truth of 'Buttons'' supposition.

"H'm—h'w—," said the gentleman, fiddling with his heavy gold watch-chain; "has—has Mr. Sinclair anyone living with him?"

Certainly he had. There was his sister, Miss Claire, who was as pretty as any young lady could wish to be; *only* "'Buttons' wasn't going to tell the gentlem'n that—not he. The gentlem'n would see it quick enough when he set his eyes on her, or, if he didn't," then, in 'Buttons'' opinion, "he wouldn't be much of a real genuwine gentlem'n."

"Was Miss Claire at home?"

Yes, she was; but she was called Miss *Sinclair* by everyone except those who knew her.

This intelligence 'Buttons' vouchsafed to say aloud, as he thought the gentleman "shouldn't be too intimate at first with his young missis's name." And, as he said it, he looked at the gentleman's fine moustache, and thought "he'd carry just such another when he was a grow'd man."

So busy was he in looking at the way it

was curled, that he didn't notice that the grand gentleman raised his eyebrows in surprise at what he, 'Buttons,' was saying "about his young missis's name."

'Buttons' was sixteen years old; his Christian name was Jack, but he was usually called 'Jock.' He had been a twelvemonth in Dr. Sinclair's service "come next July." He was very much afraid of his master, but he was staunch and loyal. No boy about dared say, but what he was at the best place in all the country round. If they did Jock knew quick enough how to give them "what for." More than this,—Jock had opinions upon a great many subjects, "'pinions not caught from nobody else, but just come clean out o' his own mind."

But, there was no time for him to form many just then, for "the gentlem'n seemed kind o' impatient."

"Take that to Miss Sinclair," he said, giving Jock a card, and preparing to follow him in.

"Miss Claire's in the drawin'-room, sir," replied Jock, doggedly, not moving, "so I'll just take this for her to look at first, if you would please to wait here a minute."

Jock thought that, as his master was out, and "the gentlem'n wasn't one as *he* knew, that he'd like to give Miss Claire a chance of thinking whether she'd see the gentlem'n whose name was on the card or no, and not have him following in close as if he had a right to."

But, the gentleman thought otherwise.

"Take that card in first, and I'll follow you," he said, authoritatively.

And 'Buttons' gave way about the matter. He thought "this gentlem'n must be a duke or a lord, or something very high, or he wouldn't think to speak so big to *him*."

Claire was engaged in carrying the plants that stood on a stand in the drawing-room, out into the garden. She had a large holland apron on, and her small hands were encased in rough working gloves; for she had been busily gardening ever since her brother had left her, early that morning. She loved gardening;—it always made her forget how long the time without Marcus was, and, besides this, whilst so engaged, she could sometimes see the violinist in his



garden, and he was so funny that it made her laugh as she watched him. Claire was not what might be called “conventional,” and had no very strict ideas of propriety, though it had been dinned into her again and again, during the years she had passed at the ‘Seminary for High-born Young Ladies.’ So she looked at many things, and laughed at many things, and enjoyed many things, because they were not what “proper people” called “proper.”

Some people look draggled, and untidy, and dirty when they are gardening,—but Claire didn’t. She had a dainty little figure, and a dainty, well-set head, with its quantity of soft, dark hair, and she had a dainty way of moving; and so, whether she had a large apron and ugly gloves on or no, she still looked well.

As Jock entered the room, she was standing bending over one of her favourite flowers, that looked weakly and out of sorts.

“Who was at the door, Jock?” she asked, not looking up, but curious to know.

“Please, miss,” answered Jock, presenting the tray to her with the card on it. If this

was a duke or a lord following him so close, "he'd not trifle with words, not he. He'd wait till he was a growed man, then he'd have speech with these lords fast enough." With which thought in his mind, Jock disappeared from the room.

Claire had taken the card from off the tray, almost mechanically. She supposed it had on it, some written message or something for her brother, which Jock had thought best to commit to her keeping. She might as well just see what it was, though, for it had been given to her, and therefore couldn't contain any private matter.

But as she looked at it and saw simply the name

*Lambert Islay*

printed there, she started back with an exclamation of dismay.

And the fine gentleman, whom Jock had mistaken for a lord or a duke, was standing close by, not two yards off her.

"What a pretty—aw—cousinly greeting!" he said in his drawling voice, with a bland smile passing over his face; "it sounded almost as if um—you'd rather I hadn't

come to see you, which—aw—to say the least is—”

“ Oh, Lambert !—I wish you hadn’t come,” she exclaimed, interrupting him, and not taking any notice of the gloved hand he was holding out to her. “ What *will* Marc say ? ”

And she looked around her in a frightened, helpless manner, as if she were completely overwhelmed at the thought of what his feelings would be, when he knew that Lambert had found out where they lived.

“ I should think he’d say—aw—that as I’ve appeared on the scenes, that you’d aw—better um—take off that great apron and those ugly gloves,” he said, regarding her critically, “ and that it would be just as well—um aw—not to lose your head so completely with the aw—pleasure of seeing me, that you forget to ask me to—um—sit down after my long walk.”

He laughed softly at his own pleasant way of saying things, and thought as he watched Claire tear off her apron and gloves, that his cousin was certainly a very pretty woman, and it suited her face remarkably well to be rather put out and distressed.

But she paid no heed to him.

“*Why* did you come, Lambert?” she asked, fixing great troubled eyes on his face.

“I came to see you, fair cousin,” he answered, seizing her hand, and raising it with mock respect to his lips; “I always said—um—you’d grow into a good-looking woman, and,—by my word,—aw—you have too!”

“Don’t talk like *that*,” Claire said, snatching her hand away, and there came a look into her usually gentle face, which forbade any, even, slight liberty being taken with her.

“Well—we’re cousins—you little wild-fire,” he remarked in his drawling tenor, as he began carefully and slowly to take off his tight kid gloves, “but I remember—um—aw—when you were a little bit of a girl, you used to be as hasty and fiery as any—”

“I don’t care what I used to be,” she broke in with, impatiently, “all I want to know is,—why have you come here, and how did you get to know we lived in this part? Tell me, Lambert—and then—then—”

But she could not finish the sentence she had begun so rapidly. What would happen



*then?* What would come to pass, now that Lambert had discovered where Marc was living, and was forcing himself upon them? Where would be the end of it all?

Claire had never cared much for her cousin, Lambert Islay. Though he had been a frequent inmate of her father's house, and had always been patronizing and, in his teasing way, kind to her, she had been inclined to look upon him with something, that was as near akin to suspicion, as her innocent, unsuspicious nature could. She supposed he was handsome in a way, with his long fair moustache and his fine-cut nose. But she could not bear the glitter in his steel eyes;—eyes that could look upon any cruelty, any wrong, any outrage with a calm unfeeling gaze, as if nothing on which they rested, were worthy of being considered or commiserated. She had seen him comparatively little during the last year she had spent in her home, and she remembered she had been rather glad of it than otherwise; rather relieved that she hadn't to see him always reclining in some easy chair, with a newspaper or sporting dramatic in his hand; or else, find him stroll-

ing about twirling his moustache, and giving his opinions upon things he knew nothing about. She hated men who had no profession and who idled their life away, just because they happened to have money enough not to work. She often wondered how her father, with his sharp, business-like capacities, could tolerate so lazy a man as Lambert. Yet, he appeared to get on very well with him. Lambert had a bland, suave manner, and an oily tongue that seemed to deceive even the acute, work-loving old man. For, strangely enough, even in men's most strained and hard-contested points, there may in them generally be traced some unaccountable weakness, some startling inconsistency. And so it was with James Islay, who, though throughout his life he had upheld the maxim that "men who did not work ought to starve," yet did not thrust this at his idle nephew, or see that he was one of those very men whom he most thoroughly despised, and most severely censured. He believed in the plans that Lambert was always setting before him, and he extolled his wisdom, in being slow and sure enough "to look before he leapt."

—There was a short pause, before Lambert Islay answered the sentence that Claire had been unable to finish. Either he was waiting to see if she were going to say anything further, or else he was considering how best to answer her repeated question. He had, practically, made up his mind what to say before he had come, before even he had begun to employ his time in tracing out where Marcus Sinclair had made his home, and where Claire now also lived. In his loose, indolent fashion, he had considered it easy enough to invent some plausible excuse, for doing what he knew was evidently desired *not* to be done, and in ferreting out that which he was certain had no wish to be disclosed. He knew also that it was no affair of his; that James Islay had never expressed the slightest wish either for the return of Claire, or for any knowledge concerning his disinherited son, Marcus. Far otherwise; in strong and bitterest language, he had repeatedly declared that they were both nothing to him, and that he never wished to hear or see anything of them again. And, therefore, it was only on his own account,

for his own gratification and for his own ends, that Lambert Islay had determined to do, that which would be disagreeable to all parties concerned, except himself. Still, as he himself was always, in his estimation, the most important and principal person to be taken into consideration, and, as it mattered not in the least to him what other people's ideas and feelings upon any subject were, it was scarcely surprising that he took the step he did.

But Claire's blunt questions puzzled him. The many plausible reasons he was going to bring forward, seemed suddenly to have become no reasons at all. He found he must invent some new ones, or else attempt to change the current of Claire's thoughts. It was not easy to do either of these; but Lambert Islay had vast confidence in himself and in his own powers, and that, in itself, would help to carry him through the difficulty. Also he had a glib tongue, and possessed the talent of running on smoothly with a good many words, containing little matter.

His cousin was still standing up, moving



restlessly about in unconcealed distress. He, himself, had sunk into an easy chair, and, having finished the removal of his gloves from off his ringed hands, began the usual satisfied handling of his moustache.

“I must tell you plainly, Claire,” he drawled, in would-be bantering tones, “that I don’t—aw—think much of your manners. Here have I arrived at this out-of-the-way place—for you can’t—aw—deny, it’s um—out of *my* way—and instead of receiving me with open arms and declaring—um aw—that I’m a good sort of fellow to trouble myself about you, why you do—aw—nothing of the sort;—all you do is to pace um—aw—up and down there, making me giddy with your—aw movements. I wonder now what um—aw—Beatrice would say if she saw—”

But Lambert found that his cousin was not heeding him in the least; so, he tried another tactic. He had always known that she was inclined to be obstinate and impetuous,—and he rather liked these *traits* in her than otherwise. Still, he had no idea she would have so little control as this, even if his arrival had upset her.

“Look here, Claire, can’t you—aw—call that block of a boy and tell him to hasten on luncheon a bit? For—um aw—I have not walked so far as I have this morning—aw—since goodness knows when, and —”

“Lambert,—can’t you go, before Marcus comes in?”

Claire had worked herself up to such a pitch, that she scarcely knew what she was saying, or for what she was asking. Something, she feverishly thought, must be done to stop Lambert’s flow of talk,—to get him out of that chair,—away from the house, before Marc saw him. For, what *would* happen if her brother came in, and found him there, cool, and bland, and smiling, making himself perfectly at home, and evidently more pleased with himself than usual.

“Go away, Lambert,”—she said, coming close to him, and, in her eagerness, laying her hand on his arm, “we don’t want you here. You will spoil our lives and make it all wretched and unhappy, just when—when we thought everything was going to be so perfect. Do—*do* go, before Marc comes in.”

The words were scarcely out of her lips, before she heard the expected heavy tread in the hall. She heard Jock's voice, big with its bit of news —

“Please, sir, there's a very fine gentlem'n with Miss Claire in the drawin' room,”—she heard the step hasten, and draw nearer and nearer, and yet—she did not move. She still stood by the side of Lambert's chair, with her hand on his arm, and her eyes fixed on the door, with a kind of wild terror in them. The worst had come;—in another moment, Marc would see Lambert lounging there, with his handsome face and self-satisfied smile. In another moment, he would see the work of years undone, and all the past that he had striven to bury, rise up again before him. She tried to move from the door,—to take her hand from Lambert's arm,—to utter some sound, just her brother's name,—but she *could not*.

And so, Marcus Sinclair strode in with his head held high, and his heavy brows lowered. Who was this gentleman with his sister? And why this strange, unnatural silence?

Still powerless to think or move, Claire

watched him coming, and saw him start and his firm steps halt, as he found her standing motionless there.

She felt him slowly drawing closer, till his tall figure almost touched hers. She could hear his breath coming quick and short, as he gazed down at the bland, smiling face of the handsome man, lying back in his chair.

Then—the spell was broken.

A terrible oath broke from Marcus Sinclair's lips, and with a face white and rigid, he turned from his cousin—whom he had not failed to recognise—and looked at his sister.

A horrible doubt and suspicion arose in his mind. The sight of Lambert, and the knowledge that the strivings of so many long years had, in one moment, become fruitless,—sank into nothing, before the darker thought that assailed him.

Had Claire deceived him? Had she betrayed his trust? Had she lured Lambert here? Was she, in secret, bound to this man?

He looked at her fiercely. But she,—knowing nothing of the hateful thought that had



seized him,—looked back at him with great eyes, misty with gathering tears.

“O Marc!” she said, snatching her hand from Lambert’s arm, and laying it, trembling and cold, in his. “I *am* so sorry for you,—oh, my brother!”

Then,—thank God, the bitter doubt that had arisen in his heart, died out. His nature, which was a noble one, refused to yield to the Devil’s temptation to suspect. He wouldn’t stoop, to what a smaller-minded man would have done.

“Go, little sister,” he said, gently, leading her to the door. “Go, dear,—you must leave me alone—with this man.”

## CHAPTER X.

### A STORMY SCENE.

LAMBERT ISLAY had remained silent, during the time that intervened between the entrance of Marcus and the exit of Claire.

He did not, in the least, regret the step he had taken in coming, when he saw the distress and anger it was causing. On the contrary, he was simply amused by it. The game he was playing, bid fair to be more exciting than he had anticipated.

But, as he watched the young doctor close the door, and noticed his powerfully-built figure, and the determined set of his head, he thought to himself, that it was just as well he had timed his arrival when he had,—just as well that he was there just then, complacently seated in Sinclair's room, and not demanding admittance at Sinclair's door. For he remembered that this cousin of his, who had been little more than a grown-up

boy when he had last seen him, had been a hot-headed, peculiar young fellow, with his own perverse notions and high-standard views. One who would not be turned an inch from what he upheld. One who looked at life on its serious, gloomy side, and didn't see anything in it, that led him to consider it a playground, or an idle lounging-seat.

But Lambert Islay also remembered that Marcus was slow of speech; that words did not flow easily from his lips; that arguments only came after careful forethought. There was little chance that he would have changed much in this latter respect;—probably, not at all. Thus, if there was going to be a stormy interview between them, there could be no doubt that he, Lambert Islay, would have the upper hand. He could argue and talk on more volubly than most men; besides, he wouldn't be handicapped by any such things as feelings, which generally seemed to disturb and trouble other people.

So, as Dr. Sinclair turned from the door, he found his cousin still leaning back in his chair with nonchalant ease, and with the same tempered, irritating smile passing over his face.

The young doctor was not quick of speech, otherwise he would have spoken first. He meant to, but Lambert was before him.

“ Well, Marc, old fellow, how are you ? ” he drawled, slightly raising himself, and holding his hand out in a friendly way, “ awful long time um—since we met. Don’t know that I should have aw—recognised you if I had—um aw seen you about anywhere. Why—um—you’ve got grey hairs, old boy ;—how d’you come aw—by those, eh ? Here am I years—um—older than you, and haven’t got one. Glad—um—aw to see me, eh ?—*eh* ? Why don’t you speak, man ? ”

“ What has brought you here ? ” growled Sinclair, standing before his cousin, with folded arms and head bent slightly, as he glared down at him. His face was pale, and the veins on his high forehead, were standing out in angry, purple knots.

Lambert Islay laughed softly, and shifted his position.

“ Come—come, my dear fellow, don’t glare away like that,” he said, avoiding the gaze, by casting his eyes around the room. “ Why, you’ve got—um aw—a comfortable enough



berth here,—there's—um—no reason why you should be ashamed of my seeing it. And Claire,—she seemed all right too, though um—I must say she's lost something—um aw—by er—this bargain, for, of course, money's —”

“That's no affair of yours,” broke in Sinclair, hurling the words at him, while a deep flush overspread his dark face.

Had this man come here to insult, as well as injure, him by his presence?

“Well, I don't know,” rejoined Lambert, forgetting to drawl, but still laughing—“*you* think it is—ha ha,—Claire's and your affair;—but—I think—ha ha—it's mine. And I'll tell you why, if you'll sit down and talk to a fellow rationally, and not stand looming over me like that. It—um aw—makes one uncomfortable, too, to see you standing when there's no need for it. Or—um—by-the-bye,”—drawling, — “couldn't you ring for luncheon first, and then have a—aw—good talk and a smoke after? What—um aw—do you think now?”

Lambert Islay thought that his coolness and good-nature, would be most likely to

carry the day. But he was mistaken. He was miscalculating the man he had to deal with. He was overstepping the bounds of anger's patience, he was ignoring altogether that he, the designing injurer, was speaking to the injured.

"You insolent dog—you confounded fop," exclaimed Sinclair fiercely, seizing his cousin, and dragging him forcibly from the chair in which he was lounging, "can't you stand up as a man and not lie there like a—a—a scented,—soft-headed fool,—drawling out your cool insults,—taking possession of *my* room,—and asking for *my* food, when you are perfectly aware that you have come here against my express wish, that—"

"My dear fellow, don't excite yourself," interposed Lambert, resenting somewhat the violent hands his cousin had laid on him, but determined, notwithstanding, to hold the game by his pertinacious good temper. "I've not bothered myself to come here, or laboured my time away, for the purpose—aw—of annoying you. We never—um aw—cared enough for each other for that, you know—did we, you know? Eh, now?—Just

recollect, we were never the—um—best of chums, were we, eh?"

But Sinclair vouchsafed no answer. If Lambert's object was to gain time, he wouldn't assist him in any way. In his anger and bitterness, he would have liked to have kicked him out of the house there and then, but he knew he would be committing a fatal mistake by so doing. So, with a powerful effort, he controlled himself, though the shadow on his face darkened, and the fire in his angry eyes gleamed dangerously.

Evidently, Lambert's aim in coming, was not simply curiosity or the desire to annoy him. What, then, was it? Surely his (Marcus's) father, could not be wishing for a reconciliation? He knew the man—James Islay,—inexorable, ruthless—too well, to hold that supposition for a moment. But there was another thought that forced its way into his brain, which brought the remembrance of that suspicion that had arisen in his mind, when he had first entered the room, and found his sister standing with her hand laid on this man's arm. The recollec-

tion, for the moment, seemed to turn him sick and dizzy, making the figure of Lambert, as it lolled against the high mantelpiece, look like a black splotch in a room, where a brilliant June sun was mockingly shining in. He tried to cast it from him, as he dimly heard Lambert's meandering drawl begin again;—but it was of no avail, it stood out there in his brain colossal, with every other thought in shadow beside it.

“Why,—you seem um aw—to have a shorter memory than I have,” Lambert was saying, as he calmly examined the massive rings on his white, womanish hands, “for I recollect we used to—used to um—clash in pretty nearly everything. You were so abominably um aw—righteous, you know, and rather—rather overbearing, considering you were but a—um—youngster, you know, compared with me. Even Uncle James used to beard me on, you know, to put you down when um aw—you got upon some of your—um—confounded querities. But—um—by-the-bye, Uncle James would be rather—rather —”

“Rather what?—you slow, babbling idiot,”



demanded Sinclair, catching the meaning of the last few words.

He had heard nothing of what had come before.

“ Well, you know, rather—rather off—off—well, I mean—um—a little surprised and possibly—possibly wrathful, you know, at my — ”

“ Then, it’s only for your own ends, that you have annoyed Claire and me, by coming here ? ” said Sinclair, in a measured voice, his anger not in the least abating, but feeling a certain numbness of patience creeping over him.

Lambert noticed the change, and thought his plan of procedure was beginning to make way. So he advanced on a little quicker towards the end he had in view, which was, practically, to state the reason for his presence in Sinclair’s house. It wouldn’t have done at all, he thought, to have come out with it at once ; but now that Sinclair had cooled down a bit, he might just as well hasten on, get it over, and have some lunch. For he was feeling the novel sensation of hunger, and ‘ lunch ’ was occupying an

important area in his brain. His cousin seemed to be helping him along, too, by mentioning Claire's name. So, fully satisfied with himself for having advanced favourably,—as he thought,—so far, he took his elbow off the mantelpiece, moved a few paces off, and, seeing the chair he had lately occupied, threw himself into it again with a sigh. He wasn't going to stand, when he could sit. Why should he?

“Oh! well, of course, it's for my own ends,” he said, hastening his drawl somewhat, and regulating his voice to a certain even intonation, to give his listener the idea that he was saying a quite ordinary and to-be-expected thing. “No man in his senses, my dear fellow, would think—aw—of taking the trouble I have,—*except* for his own—um aw—purposes and ends. And, as I said before, it wouldn't have—er—been um—worth my while to have put myself out simply for the—er—excitement of annoying you,—not worth my while, you know,—you agree with me, don't you, eh?”

He paused for an answer; but, getting none, lounged further back in his chair, and

continued in rather quicker tones, as he thus neared his point —

“We agree then about it—wouldn’t have been worth the candle,—at all events on my side of the question. But, you know, it was rather a different thing, when you came and took what I had—well, had um—settled upon for my own property,—when you just calmly walked off with my kettle of —”

“Speak out plainly, or, by Heaven, I’ll —” exclaimed Sinclair, once more gripping hold of his cousin. But, this time, he pinioned him down in his chair in a grasp of iron, beneath which the cool, handsome, irritating man found himself powerless to move.

Yet, Sinclair was only waiting to hear his own thought and conviction put into words. He knew what was coming; but the knowledge of it maddened him none the less.

Lambert Islay’s steel eyes glittered. He had made a false move. There was no retrieving the error; so, the only way was to go on, and get to the end of this scene as quickly as possible. No other course lay open to him, situated as he now was.

“Oh! you want my reason given rather

plainer, do you?" he said, still with dogged determination, preserving his cool insolence of tone. "Well, it's all the same to me, only I don't particularly care about being—er—in such close quarters when I'm speaking—um—to the point, you know. However, here goes,"—raising his tenor voice a tone higher, and slurring over the ends of his words with a more affected drawl than he had yet put on,—“I've had enough—um—of bachelordom, and am going to marry—aw—a pretty girl with a bit of um aw—money, and um—the girl I'd chosen was Cl—”

He stopped short. The hand of Claire's brother was *not* pressing more heavily on him. On the contrary,—Lambert Islay suddenly found himself liberated, and the face of his aggressor no longer close to his.

Marcus Sinclair had walked to the window. This bit of platonic mechanism fairly took him aback. This phlegmatic, cold-blooded, soulless *insouciance*, of what he knew should draw out a man's deepest emotions and feelings, for the moment completely staggered him. If his cousin had come and passionately



avowed his love for Claire, and in word or look shown his devotion to her,—Sinclair would have been angry, but not speechless. He would have been chafed, but not revolted ; indignant, but not dumbfounded.

There was a certain farcical humour in the scene, which an onlooker might have observed. It didn't strike Sinclair in that light at all. Naturally, everything took a grave and serious turn with him, and an interview of this kind was not likely to prove an exception.

His stupefaction was but momentary. He turned from the window, and faced his cousin.

“ You have come here, then, I presume, to ask for the return of Claire ? ” he said, forcing each word out in a peculiar marked way, but otherwise speaking with a strange calmness ; “ and you wish for her return for the sole reason—that her father may settle a sum of money on her during his lifetime, and—after his death—, that she may be left joint heiress with Beatrice of all his possessions. You have taken the trouble,—you have undergone the inconvenience,—you have spent much valuable time in doing this,—yet, as it is not for her interest but for yours,—these

may be taken as very small considerations. Not for *her* interest, I rep—”

“Stay a moment, my dear fellow,—it’s hardly fair to —”

But Sinclair was in no mood to brook interruptions. He had waited long enough;—it was his turn now.

“What I have to say you’ll hear to the end,” he said, in tones so decisive, that his cousin almost unconsciously inclined his head, in obedience to his will, “and, further still,—what I have to ask you will answer. I will not detain you here long, as it will neither benefit you nor me to enter into any lengthy discussions. All we have to do is, to come to an understanding. Thus, I repeat, it is *not* for her interest that you have forced yourself upon us here, but for your own. May I ask, therefore, as it is—*money* you want to marry,—why did you not fall in love with Beatrice’s money, which is secure and ready to hand?”

The question was evidently not a difficult one for Lambert to answer, for he handled his moustache and smiled serenely, as he said—

“Well,—you know, it’s like this—um aw

—I omitted, I think, to tell you that I'm—well, I'm—aw—in love with Claire, and I'm not with Beatrice. It makes—aw—a little difference, you see.”

“ Indeed ! ”

The contempt in Sinclair's tone was unveiled, as, in this single word, he expressed his opinion of the difference.

“ And, I believe, I mentioned to you that—um—I wanted a pretty wife,” continued Lambert, with calm indifference; “ and, though Beatrice wasn't bad in her way once, still—you know, she — ”

“ We have no time to enter into particulars ! ” exclaimed Sinclair, impatiently; “ if you confine yourself to just answering what I ask,—it will be sufficient.”

The expression on Lambert's face altered, as he muttered a few words about age, brevity, and the desirability of lunch.

Sinclair paid no heed to him. His brain seemed every moment to grow clearer, and every difficulty to shape itself in distinct lines.

“ I want, secondly, to know,” he went on, “ upon what ground you are working ? Are you assured,—supposing Claire did agree to

return to her home,—that her father would overlook her grave offence, in having cast in her lot with me? Otherwise, I don't see your object in wishing to make her your wife."

"I'm as assured as—um—I wish, or need to be," answered Lambert, carelessly; "your father and I get on very well together, you know,—we never thought it necessary to—"

"I understand," said Sinclair,—“you intend that the money question shall be favourably settled. That's your chief concern, of course. But,—unfortunately for you, there lies another difficulty which you have to get over, before your path is cut out perfectly clearly. Probably, you consider it a very slight one, and scarcely worth a passing thought, but still, that doesn't dispense with it altogether. To me, it appears a rather important item in this distinctly mechanical affair. But,—to the point,—you say you are in love with Claire, or, rather with her face and the money you expect from her; but how do you know that she is—well,—*in love with you?*”

Sinclair brought out these last words in a



voice absolutely expressionless, followed by a low laugh. The calmness with which he had hitherto spoken, had been painfully forced. It was not natural to him to express himself either clearly or concisely. He had never before been able to conceal all feeling so completely that, as he was speaking, he listened to himself, and thought that it was not his, but another man's voice, uttering the words. Thus, he laughed ironically at his own metamorphosis.

The last question that he meant to ask, was this one. As he formed it, he seemed to hear Claire's voice saying again, "I shall never marry," as she had gravely told him not many weeks ago. Heavens! if Fate had this only to offer her,—then, indeed, wisdom lay in her words.

Lambert Islay paused half a moment before he answered. His cousin had, unfortunately, touched upon—what he considered—the only weak point in his pleasant arrangement. He, himself, knew that Claire was not in love with him, but his confidence in himself and his own powers to charm, were not likely to be shaken by this.

He thought he would treat the question lightly.

“My dear fellow,” he drawled, affectedly, “what a thing—aw—to ask me. One would think you knew nothing of the fair sex—um—why,——a good-looking man, knowing something—aw—of the art of love-making, has simply—um aw—the whole game in his own—”

“Has he?” roared Sinclair, striding up to Lambert, his forced calmness gone and his anger and scorn breaking madly out,—“but I tell you that the game is *not* entirely his, and never will be if he seeks to play it with any true and right-minded woman. You men, who go seeking after money and looks,—cast a slur upon all the deepest and most sacred feelings of which man is capable. You mock at love,—you make your homes places of discord, ending in your shameful divorces and dishonoured separations. If you want to play your game with any moneyed woman,—go elsewhere. Go to those who lay themselves out to captivate such as you. Go to those who know of no other duty in life, than the duties of spending time,—

money, — talents, — upon disfiguring themselves to look well.—What have you come here for? To offer Claire a *stone* and call it a *man's heart*? To re-enact that ghastly farce in which your uncle—I call him not my ‘father’—played, when, bit by bit, he wrung from my mother all that made life dear to her?”

He stopped breathlessly, his whole face quivering, and great drops of moisture standing on his brow.

“Go on, my dear fellow, go on,” sneered Lambert, seizing the opportunity to put in his ever-ready word. “I’ve not listened to so good a sermon for a long time. You’ve the making of a strait-laced parson in you,—it’s really a pity you have missed your evident vocation.”

“Your very shadow darkens these doors,” went on Sinclair bitterly, unheeding the other’s stinging words. “Why could you not have gone after those many women, who would have loved to have toyed with your smooth words, and gazed at your handsome face? Why come to despoil me of my one possession? Why thrust yourself in here when

we have no need of you? Why cast more bitters into my life, when already my path has been strewn thickly with them? Why have —”

“Either a parson or an eloquent street pr— ”

“Enough!—I waste my words on you,—I should have known—I should have thought—a man, such as you, has need to be treated differently from other men. You live in a lower grade,—you are without heart or feelings,—you are made up of conceit and mockery,—your bland tongue hides your lying words,—your fair face covers your hideous deceits, your contemptible devices, your debasing motives.—Aye, you shall have my answer to —”

“Stay,”—broke in Lambert again, rising from his chair, and advancing towards the closed door; “if you think I am going to take *your* answer, when Claire is now of age to give me her own, you are mistaken. Lower grade or no, I am neither such a fool nor such a dullard, as you are. Policy, at least, should have led you to have chosen your words and your epithets rather more



nicely.—I, at least, am a gentleman—you, perhaps, by the profession you have entered, —are *not*.”

As the last words stang from his lips, he turned the handle of the door with a sharp click. But Sinclair's foot was against it.

Lambert's face grew livid with rage. He raised his fist to strike,—but quickly dropped it again. His cousin was a taller, broader, more powerfully built man than he was. Lambert would be carrying the game beyond his own play, if he made a move in this direction.

“I will not leave this house till I have seen Claire, and received her own answer,” he said, doggedly.

“Yes, you will,” replied Sinclair; “for you will not see Claire again to-day, and—you leave this house now.”

“I shall return after a few days, and claim her answer then.”

“No;—you will leave this house and this neighbourhood now, and you will not return until three months have gone by. Then, claim your answer if you will.”

For a moment, the two men's angry eyes met. The two wills silently fought. The two natures measured their powers. Then,—the weaker yielded.

“At the end of three months, from this day, I return to see Claire alone,” said Lambert Islay; “meanwhile,—I will amuse myself by working you harm.”

“As you will,” said Sinclair, opening the door, “but I should hardly think it was *worth your while*.”

Lambert laughed sneeringly.

“You speak truly,” he said, assuming his customary drawl; “it wouldn't be worth my um—while. Besides, in taking the trouble to work *your* harm, I might perhaps—um—er—betray our close relationship. And I,—for my part, have no wish to—um aw—run the risk of—so lowering myself.”

## CHAPTER XI.

### SUSPICIONS.

THREE months !

Why had Marcus Sinclair stated that that period was to elapse, before Lambert Islay might return and claim his answer from Claire ? Why did he wish to put off the disagreeableness of the affair ? Why protract the annoyance ? Why not, rather, have named three days after, and not three months ?

Lambert Islay, as he slowly made his way back along the high road to the town of O—, indolently wondered at what his cousin's motive, in this respect, could have been. Not, however, able to come quickly to any very probable conclusion, he changed the current of his thoughts, and speculated instead upon which hotel he should lunch at, and whether he should stay the night in O—, as he was there,—or no.

His anger had passed with the turn of the

wind. It was too much trouble to be roused for more than a few moments together; besides,—really, nothing was worth the while. The hot insults his cousin had showered upon him, scarcely rankled or caused him any disturbance. He dismissed them from his mind, with an inward laugh at the ridiculous amount of trouble people give themselves for such little causes. He sneered good-humouredly at the commotion they seemed to get into over the merest trifles. He smiled serenely at the feeling—sentiment, emotion,—or whatever they choose to call it,—that they so readily display.

Still,—if he hadn't been so well-bred and so gentlemanly, he would certainly have thought twice about staying for a few days in O—; and, by some means or other, paying Marcus out for his incivility. It was preposterous that these men, with their superior height and strength, should lash themselves into a fury, and say and do what they liked, and carry all before them with a high hand, simply owing to their brute force, and to the little control they seem to possess over their movements.



But, it did not at all suit Lambert Islay's view of life, to mix himself up in any broils, either for the sake of the girl he thought he was in love with, or for her money. There were other girls about with pretty faces, and as to money—well, though he had run through most of his, there was nothing so safe or so sure as borrowing—at least, for a while. But to put himself out about the matter, and to lower himself so far as to acknowledge his connection with a medical man, who lived in a small house, the rent of which could not amount to much more than £50 or £60 a year,—this was out of the question altogether. Lambert Islay was too gentlemanly—as he understood the word—too indolently, too disdainfully good-natured, too torpid,—to do anything more just then, than swear genteelly that he would continue to play the game after a while, take his time about it, and in the end win. But, for the present, he would have his lunch, and a good one too. He might concoct some kind of love-letter to Claire afterwards, while he was enjoying a smoke over his wine—it would warm him up to the sentiment. Not that he required

much warming up, for Claire was undoubtedly a very pretty girl, and possessed of just so much obstinacy and passion as to make her both interesting and amusing.

This, then, was the state of Lambert Islay's ideas—they could scarcely be termed feelings—shortly after his stormy interview with his cousin. He was one of those handsome, self-satisfied, easy-going gentlemen at large, of whom the fewer there are in the world, the better for the world. They are polished, but not chivalrous; smooth in speech, yet coarse in thought; scrupulous as to their rights as gentlemen, yet unscrupulous in their actions as gentlemen; fair on the outside of the platter, but soiled and stained on the inside. Morally and intellectually, they are living in a lower sphere of life, than that in which their fellow-men are living. The god they worship is that low one—Self; it is not worth their while, they practically hold, to worship any higher one. It would place too much check upon them to bow down to an Omnipotent; though, for the sake of their standing in society, they will just acknowledge the existence of a

Creator. It would scarcely place them on so good or sure a footing in the world, if they called themselves—Atheists. So for their god—Self's—sake, they go to a Place of Worship sometimes, use occasionally the name of the Most High, and, at seasons, even demean themselves so far as to enter into religious discussions.

These are the men who, morally and intellectually, degrade and lower society ; they being, seemingly, without special virtue, and equally without special vice, yet—their whole characters and existences leaven mortally for evil. ‘Instead of aspiring to a high type,’ as a deep thinker remarks, ‘they submit to reversion of type, following out that principle by which the organism, failing to develop itself, failing even to keep what it has got,—deteriorates, and becomes more and more adapted to a degraded form of life.’ Men like Lambert Islay are more to be feared as leavenors for evil, than the men with glaring vices or contemptible weaknesses; the latter warn by those very vices, while the former allure by their apparent freedom from them.

But more of Lambert Islay anon.

Very different from his cousin's, were the thoughts and feelings of Marcus Sinclair. As he closed his house door upon Lambert, the prominent feeling in his mind was that of a vague, yet real, relief.

"He is gone," he muttered to himself; "never again will I see him. Of all men, he is one of a kind which I hate and loathe most. And for him—to force himself in here, to—to—"

He did not finish uttering his thoughts; his indignation was too great. Besides, at that moment, as he stepped uncertainly, as if darkness were around him and not broad daylight, he felt a hot, feverish hand laid on his, and in the apparent gloom he saw a white face looking up.

"Marc—my brother," said Claire, for she had crept trembling down the stairs, the moment she had heard the steps in the hall, and the door closed; "he has gone?—You were stronger than he?—He won't ever come again,—you—you have made him promise? You—you—"

He interrupted her darkly,—sternly.

"We shall not see him again, Claire, I sw—"



“Oh! Marc!” she exclaimed, leaning against him. “What—never?—Is it all a bad dream about his coming? It wasn’t that he wanted to break up our life together, and force me to go back to Father and Beatrice again? Marc,—O Marc, I have been so unhappy,—I thought—thought—”

Then, with a woman’s usual weakness at times of great relief, she burst into tears, as she clung tightly to her brother.

Gently, he led her to a chair, and tried to calm and soothe her. But he did it mechanically, scarcely knowing what he was doing or what he was saying. All that rose up before him was, that he must just then put his own feelings and anger in the background, and try and comfort and reassure her—his child-sister—who seemed doubly precious to him now.

By degrees, she grew calmer; the heavy sobs lessened, and the great, wistful eyes lost something of their frightened look.

Tell me, Marc,” she whispered, “*how* did he come here? *How* did he find out where you lived?”

“I don’t know,” he said, gloomily;

“wouldn't have made any difference for me to ask him *how* he came,—when he was already here.”

“Ah, but—” she began; then, seeing the peculiar strained look on her brother's face, she changed what she was going to say into, “Marc, you look so tired—so grey. Can't you sit down and close your eyes and rest,—rest just a little, and, if you can, forget a bit, because—because now it is all over.”

He looked at her and did not for a moment answer.

She could feel that, though he was gazing hard at her, he was not seeing her. It was the blind stare of an over-occupied and half-bewildered mind.

“Marc,” she said again, raising herself from the chair in which he had placed her, for she felt dimly afraid of his strange look.

He gave a hoarse laugh.

“What are you talking about, Claire?” he said, making a ghastly attempt to hide the state of his feelings from her. “Rest?—Bah!—Am I a man at large, that I can take rest when I need it—lounge here thinking—just because I want to? Eh? I'm no

Lambert, thank Heaven.—What are you talking about rest to me for? Do you know it's close upon three o'clock, Claire?"

"Yes, but—"

"No time for buts and talk," he said, harshly, turning from her. "I ought to have been out at two, so there,—I'm an hour late as it is. Time waits for no man,—and I tell you it isn't for long, Claire—it isn't for long—but I'd better not let them know it yet—not yet, why should I? It'll feed their minds nicely after, when—when—"

He paused.

"What do you mean, Marc?" asked she timidly, wondering, as Lambert was never going to return again, why Marc should be so upset and so queer. She couldn't understand, in the least, to what he was referring.

"It doesn't matter what I mean," he answered, rather more gently, but still enigmatically; "I didn't say I meant anything. I don't think, or mean, or say anything,—except that my whole afternoon is filled up, and as I am late now, I shall not be back till—till—well,—don't expect me or wait for me, until you see me;—do you

understand, Claire? I may be late—very late.”

As he spoke, he tossed a cap on his head, and began going out.

“Where are you going?” she asked, growing more and more perplexed by his strange manner. “Do you know, you’ve put your old garden cap on instead of—”

“Have I?—stupid!” he interrupted, laughing again. “Find my hat for me, Claire—I can’t see it. Where am I going? Why,—to my patients, of course. D’you think they get well just because trouble has come to us? No—no, the world’s not made like that. Ha!—I’m off. Good-bye, Claire,—why,—how white you look, child.”

“Marc, I’m frightened for you,” she said, as he stooped and looked anxiously into her scared face. “Can’t you eat or drink something before you go out, for I know—yes, I feel sure—you are not well.”

“Eat—drink? No—no,” he said, frowning. “Why, the first mouthful would choke me. I’m all right, Claire,—don’t fuss about me, and don’t bother yourself when I’m gone—about that man.”



“If only I knew that you weren’t fretting yourself about him,—I shouldn’t, Marc,” she said, trying to smile as she spoke. “But do just promise me one thing,—you won’t be very, very late, will you?—because it will be so long without you, and with that thought with me alone all the time.”

His face softened.

“No, dear; I won’t be very late,” he said, more gently. “I forgot about your feelings, and was only thinking of my own—selfish brute that I am. I believe I’m only fit to live by myself, after all,—and yet—”

He did not finish his sentence.

“Marc,—don’t say that,” said Claire, passionately, throwing her arms round his neck, “How can you, when we love each other so much, and you are *everything* to me?”

Then he went off to his round of duties, and she, like all women, was left at home to think and brood over what had happened, and wait and long for the continual sympathy, which it is part of woman’s nature to require, and which she so seldom gets. Ah! the women,—the women! Is their lot so easy? Are their burdens so light? Is their path so

strewn with flowers?—Aye, their lot would be easy, their burdens be but light, and their pathways strewn with flowers,—if, oftener, the men would stoop to lend them a hand, or find time in the midst of their greater thoughts and works, to give the look and word of sympathy. But, alas ! in the rush of labour, in the press of occupation, in the necessity for speeding on in the Race of Life for the bread of life,—the beauty and value of cultivating the finer instincts is lost sight of. And thus, the women also fail in their duties and in their higher desires, and become cold and unlovable. It is very wrong of them, doubtless ; yet there is such a thing as “ hope deferred making the heart sick,”—and, it is that the women’s hearts become so weary and sick with waiting for what they do not get—or, perhaps, for what they so sparingly get—that makes many of them what they are : so imperfect, so incompetent, so *unable* to be the helps-meet for the men !

Fortunately for Dr. Sinclair, his work that afternoon was close and heavy. He had a consultation of grave importance to attend in the town of O—, besides several cases to in-

quire into, out of his usual routine. Both required deliberate and serious thought ; any preoccupation, or, other than weighed opinion, might prove fatal. Sinclair knew this, and with the strength that had been born to him, by the many ordeals through which he had already been forced to pass, he pulled himself together and determined, notwithstanding the leaden weight at his heart and the fever of restless thought in his brain, to prove equal to what lay before him within those next few hours.

Thus it was not until late that night, when Claire had retired to rest and the duties of the day were over, that Marcus Sinclair broke from the restraint in which he had forcibly bound himself, and looked face to face at the calamity that had come to him. For, he could regard the arrival of Lambert in no other light than that of a calamity. As it had dimly struck Claire, so it plainly struck him. In the same way as she had questioned to herself, when she first saw her cousin—"Where would be the end of this? What would it not lead to? What did it not entail?"—so it shaped itself in his mind.

In the natural exaggeration of the evil, which is a part of the realizing shock of it, he seemed to see in it the death-blow of all his hopes. His heated fancy pictured himself cast back to where he was seven years ago,—his social standing undermined,—his endeavours fruitless,—his hard-earned popularity as a clever physician lost,—his honourable name trampled upon,—and, worse still, perhaps, his home, which had become within the last few months so dear to him, desolated.

Yet now, as, with a certain amount of calmness, he looked back upon the details of that interview with Lambert, he saw clearly that he had been upheld throughout, by the knowledge of one thing. Heavy as the blow was, he recognised that it might have been heavier. Cruel, bitter, remorseless, as fate seemed to be—for he saw no Hand of a God in it—she might have been more cruel, more bitter, more remorseless. Deeply as he was again to drink of the cup of this world's gall, he might have had to drink still deeper, even to the very dregs thereof. For he knew, as he had turned with that dark and hideous doubt in his heart to look at his sister, that



his trust in her was dearer to him and far more precious held, than his own honour, welfare, or happiness. From the moment that he had looked into her face, and found written there all that was open, guileless, and true, he felt upheld by a certain fortitude and strength, which would not otherwise have been his.

But Marcus Sinclair was a fierce and proud-tempered man. Lambert's insolent allusions to the poor exchange Claire had made for herself, in choosing to live with him, had cut his pride to the quick. Foolish and almost childish the feeling was, yet it rankled as a sore. It was what the world would have said; it was what terse common sense would have said; it was even what Sinclair had thought and worried over himself at times; and yet, when plainly put into words by a man, whom he from the bottom of his heart despised, he was stung anew by it. Bitterly he questioned himself, as to what right he, against whom every man's hand seemed turned, had had to ask this sacrifice of Claire. For, sacrifice, he blindly argued it must be,—changing a home of luxury to that

of comparative poverty ; giving up the companionship and care of a father, sister, and all family connections, to live with him,—a moody, sceptical, morose man, unfit for society, or for anything so sweet as devotion and love. For everything appeared crookedly and darkly to him ; his knowledge and convictions were clouded, his judgment narrowed, his finer instincts for the time in subservience to his lower and baser ones. He was as a man with all that was wise, true, noble in him, bound tight with chains ; while all that was foolish, untrue, and perverse, at large and revelling in its freedom.

This was one of the bitter pools of the Waters of Marah, of which he was drinking. But there was another far bitterer, and far more dangerous and deadly, of which he drank still more deeply.

The appearance of Lambert, and with him of all the hated recollections of the past, stirred up within Sinclair's nature, that which was already darkly smouldering there. And this was his disbelief in man,—his denial of any good or any nobility in human nature.

He laughed grimly to himself, as he thought of the cool, easy way, in which he had answered Lambert's threat that he would work him harm by —

“As you will.”

Did he,—Marcus Sinclair,—believe for an instant, that his cousin would leave the whole matter alone, overlook and count as nothing the unpalatable opinions upon his conduct, that he, Sinclair, had expressed? Did Lambert mean what he said when he remarked that—

“It would not be worth his while?”

Did he think that Lambert would keep away from Abbeyslea for the agreed period,—that he would retire back to his usual routine of idleness and pleasure,—forget the reception he had received at his cousin's house,—and the way in which his offer for Claire's hand had been regarded? Did he imagine that Lambert's bitter sneer in reference to Sinclair's position in society, and the consequent dislike he would have in owning his relationship with him, was anything but a blinding snare? In other words, and to sum up shortly what appeared

to Sinclair, only as a confused string of burning questions,—did he trust Lambert Islay to do as he said he would, or no? Had he any reason for believing that Lambert's coming, would prove simply an incident in his and Claire's life,—to be repeated again when three months had gone, and then to pass away like other events in life, without leaving much effect behind—only a remembrance which might, after a while, sink into entire oblivion?

No ;—Marcus Sinclair took the darkest and moodiest view of the case. He couldn't trust or believe. Few men could have, probably, in his situation. Few men would have been able, even had they been closely intimate with a man of Lambert Islay's stamp, to understand the disinclination of such a man to give himself any trouble, to put himself to any inconvenience, because simply,—“Nothing was worth the while.” For it is almost an impossibility for men of highly-strung and sensitive natures, to comprehend, in the least, those of phlegmatic and torpid ones. They cannot grasp or take in, that the matters that stir their hearts and



souls to their verimost depths, that make their blood course madly through their throbbing veins,—are things of no account, or, at least, of less account to those others, than the flavour of the wine they drink, or the cut of the coat they wear.

Therefore, it was scarcely strange in Dr. Sinclair, that he imagined and mooted over the probable steps that Lambert Islay would be taking to work his harm, and the devices he would project for further prospering his suit with Claire. His whole mind became filled with an all-absorbing suspicion. He felt it eating into his very being, cramping his every thought, contracting his every feeling, and encircling his every movement.

Why, then, had he attempted to exact any promise from Lambert, whose word he doubted and whose motives he suspected? Of what avail was it to him? How would it improve or strengthen his position, or in what way did it protect Claire?

In the heat and confusion of thought at the moment, when Lambert had declared his intention of returning to receive Claire's answer from her own lips, Sinclair,—who was

neither quick at compassing difficulties, nor able to arrive at wise conclusions without deliberate thought,—felt that the only thing, just then, was to gain time. Wild ideas of throwing up his practice in Abbeyslea, of disappearing from the neighbourhood, and of settling in some far-off country, flashed through his brain. How could he stand having his footsteps dogged by Lambert? How could he live through his past history being raked up again, and thrown, with insulting exaggerations, into his face? How could he bow his proud head and have his honourable name, made the bye-word of every gossiping tongue in Abbeyslea? And how, once more, could he bear to have his heart torn by the knowledge that his sister—his dearest one,—was being dragged down with him, to become the stock for common talk and common scandal?

These had been some of the feverish and maddening thoughts, that had flashed through Sinclair's head, as, with outward calmness, he had said to his cousin —

“You will not return, till three months have gone by.”

Time—time was all that he could then

insist upon. Time to think, time to plan, time to act—wisely, if possible.

Yet as the hours went by, and still he leant back in his chair, or paced to and fro within the small compass of the room, till the dim, cold dawn crept in and competed its sickly light with the yellow glare of his lamp,—he felt every difficulty was increasing tenfold by time and thought, and that he was no nearer being able to form any plan of action now, or, as far as he could see, was likely to, than he was before.

One thing only had he come to a conclusion upon, and that was,—that Claire must be made aware at once, of the object of Lambert's visit. It would be a wrong to her not to do so. Further than this, it would be an error of judgment; for, what surety had he that his cousin was not still in the neighbourhood, and would not, notwithstanding the promise exacted from him, seek an interview with Claire, and forthwith press his suit?

Somehow, up till then, Sinclair had cherished the idea, that he could and would shield Claire from the knowledge of the true intent of Lambert's visit. He, at first, vainly strove to argue to himself, that he could keep

this from her, and thereby spare her much pain and anxiety. But the folly of even attempting to carry this out, became more and more apparent the more he thought of it, or tried to prove it possible. Claire must know of it that very morning, for,—what might not a day bring forth? And not only should she know of it, but also he would tell her of his fears and suspicions, his maddening thoughts, and his utter inability to form any reasonable plan, as to what was best to be done.

He,—Sinclair,—half smiled, as he thought of being able to open his mind to her, and of laying before her the burden that was weighing him down. He felt his heavy heart for the moment almost lightened. He did not know it, but even as within every evil sent some good lies, so it was that the bond of union between brother and sister would be, by this calamity, made threefold sure.

“Perhaps,” thought he, as he pulled out his watch to see the time, “perhaps she may be able to see more clearly what to do, than I can. I think she will, for her nature has not been stunted and cramped as mine has, so everything appears to her in a truer light.”



## CHAPTER XII.

### TAKEN TO TASK.

JUST about the time when the quiet and happiness of Sinclair's and his sister's lives, were being rudely disturbed by the appearance of Lambert Islay, a tremor of excitement was agitating the minds of the inhabitants of Abbeyslea.

It was seldom that an excitement upon so large and unexpected a scale fell to their lot. Generally, they had to feed their minds upon very ordinary and every-day occurrences, upon which, to make impressive, a considerable amount of imagination had to be brought into play. But, *this* time, there was a great deal of real fact and a great deal of striking novelty in the rumour, which was flying about from house to house.

The Reverend George Gambray, incumbent of the church of Abbeyslea for over fifteen years, had announced his intention of

retiring from any further work or calls upon the powers and energies of a life, already well-advanced in years. He was not what could be called, in any way, broken down in health, from over labour or injudicious zeal on behalf of the Church, of which he was a kind and benevolent representative. But he had,—he thought,—so far done and finished his duty in that state of life in which God had called him, as to, with a peaceable conscience, have earned the enjoyment of complete rest and freedom, from the toils and restraints which the position of a working clergyman necessarily imposed upon him. His stipend was a matter of little account to him; and thus, though in some way regretting it, he had, after several months of careful and silent consideration, resolved to make this unexpected move. It was rather a trial to his conservative opinions and to his love of monotony, regularity, and fixture. But he, at this period, advanced out of his usual routine of thought, and argued to himself that, whether pre-arranged or no, changes must, at intervals, take place; therefore, in this case, why should not he, in an orderly

manner, take time by the forelock, and make the move which sooner or later would have to be made?

Anxious to do it all as quietly as possible, and knowing somewhat of the propensities of his parishioners, the Reverend George Gambray thought good to keep his intention in the dark, until within a very short while of the actual time of his departure. Possessing few relatives and being naturally reserved about his own private affairs, he had found this possible. His only child, a daughter,—delicate, retiring, shy, was the one and only person whom he consulted upon the matter; and, as his slightest wish was law to her, he knew that, until he spoke of his intention, no hint or surmise of his movements would become known. Thus, he hoped to limit to the confines of a short fortnight, the disagreeableness of being the talk of his own parish. He was a quiet, amiable, peace-loving man, disliking talk when it came too near home, and wishing only to make this change in his life as quickly and unobservedly as possible. He had found it quite unpleasant enough to bring himself to

any determination upon the matter itself; without wishing to have any further trouble, in having it opinionated upon and quizzed by those around him.

But, be the time never so short for some piece of unexpected news to circulate, it will pass through much the same process of manipulation, as if the period given it were longer. It will have to be submitted to the fire of public opinion,—to be rapidly digested, to be rapidly reviewed. Perhaps, indeed, when the time given is only a short one, the piece of news stands at a disadvantage; it gives more chance for the sweets of exaggeration, misrepresentation, and hasty condemnation. Thus, it was questionable whether the Reverend George Gambray profited anything by his care, or no. If he thought to escape the remarks and ‘too late’ advice of his parishioners, he was mistaken. If he hoped that his kindness, geniality, and long-suffering docility, during the past fifteen years of his ministry in Abbeyslea, would spare him, in any way, from his share of that which no man holding any public office ever escapes,—he had not learnt



one of the tacit, though unpleasant lessons of life. Grey hairs and long service do *not* shield, when the public's advice has not been sought, and thus the public's rights have not been acknowledged.

In this case,—which not unfrequently happens,—a lady, standing high in the social circles of Abbey'slea, took upon her, not unwillingly, the difficult task of letting the Rector know what a mistake he had made in settling his own affairs, without consulting others—others, who, perforce, must know better than he. Mrs. Forrester was the acknowledged spokeswoman of the Parish; if those around her shrank from letting a delinquent know wherein he had, in their opinion, erred, *she* never omitted the performance of this duty.

Thus it was, that scarcely two days had passed since the rumours had spread, before the Rector, who was trying sedulously to avoid single-handed encounters with any of his people, was brought face to face with the lady, whom he most wished to avoid. He would rather have discussed his motives and reasons a hundred times over with any, or

all, the men in Abbey'slea, than be brought to bay by Mrs. Forrester. For, charming, clever, charitable even, as he repeatedly acknowledged this lady to be, the Rector—priest of God, yet not exempt from human frailties—stood in the same fear and awe of the keen-pointed arrows that quivered from her smooth tongue, as did all others, who had not even the vantage-ground upon which to stand that he had.

He had been holding one of the two services of the week in the old Parish Church; one of those services which were so scantily and grudgingly attended. It had commenced with only *one* member forming a congregation, besides the all-attendant clerk. The responses and alternate verses in the Psalms were repeated by only one voice, besides the stentorian mumble issuing from that lowest seat. For the Rector's daughter—a fair, slight girl of some seventeen or eighteen years, with a pale, sweet face, and a stooping, undeveloped figure, the only regular worshipper in the House of God at these 'Readings of Prayers,'—was in her usual place, and, as usual, alone. But, before the

second lesson was read, the Rector became aware of another presence, of another more devout, more supplicating, and more exacting worshipper. He did not raise his eyes to see which of the parishioners had *favoured* the service; which had spared the few moments wherein to bow the knee to their Creator. He had no need. The high-pitched voice, that so effectually drowned the weak and reverently-lowered voice of his daughter, the exact changes of expression in it—denoting devout confession, supplication, praise—that reached his ear, told him that the most punctilious Churchwoman of Abbeyslea was on her knees, with bowed head and locked hands, pharisaically cleaning the outside of the platter. But the Rector was a good man, his personal religion was sincere; and so, though he unconsciously roused his rather drowsy-sunk tones into those more befitting a presiding minister, because he was in the presence of Mrs. Forrester, still, his inner man was seeking its God, and within a few moments he had forgotten the addition to his congregation, only becoming aware of it again when the service

was over, and he was making his way to the vestry.

“She will waylay me,” thought he, as he disrobed, “and I’d rather not see her.”

The Rector was not exactly a coward, but if he could avoid what he didn’t like, he would, providing no actual or striking duty lay in the path. And, at this moment, he felt he particularly disliked the idea of conversation with Mrs. Forrester.

“Eva will be talking to her outside the porch,” he thought to himself again, as he slowly reached down his hat from a well-worn peg;—“rather a penance for her, poor darling, still—it would be worse for me, so I’ll —”

“No, I won’t,” he said aloud, knitting his brows. “Eva will get the brunt of it all, if I don’t show myself, and that’s scarcely fair on the poor child,—shy, gentle puss, that she is ;——besides, it’s my doing, not hers,—not that that will make much difference to our worthy friend! I wish —”

But the Rector did not express aloud what his wish was. At that moment, he must certainly have desired most, to be anywhere



but within a few paces of Mrs. Forrester. And probably, he would have kept at some distance off, if it had not been for Eva. But to save her, and for her sake, he had often gone through what cost him great effort. His gentle, motherless daughter was dearer to him than his own self. So now, to release her from what he knew she was shrinking,—yet, sorely against his own will and inclination, he advanced consciously into the lion's mouth.

The land lay just as he fully expected that it would. Outside the Church, barely an ell's length from the porch, stood Mrs. Forrester towering over his daughter. For Mrs. Forrester had a great deal of “presence;” she, somehow, nearly always looked as if she were towering over whomever she was in conversation with. Even the Rector had this uncomfortable feeling, when he was talking to her. Not that she was such an extraordinary tall woman or that he was a short man, but it was the impression that her finely-formed and fully-developed figure, with the high set of her beautiful head, gave. Perhaps it was this, or perhaps it was the subtle magnetism

of her thoughts, which had the power of giving this impression to all those, who came in immediate contact with her.

As Eva heard her father's step, she raised her face that had been half-lowered, while she had been stammering out some kind of scarcely audible answer, to one of Mrs. Forrester's difficult questions. The face raised was hot and flushed, and the shy eyes, that looked as if tears were not far from them, gave a quick glance of relief. The Rector, though not a particularly observant man, noticed both; and felt thankful that his natural pusillanimity, had not kept him longer in the vestry.

"How d'you . . ." he began, extending his hand genially to his parishioner.

He could get no further, for he was slow of speech, and Mrs. Forrester was very quick.

"Oh, I was just telling your daughter, Mr. Gambray," she said, in her clear voice, still bending a severe and critical blue eye upon Eva's stooping shoulders, and nervously twitching hands, "that it's a perfectly unheard-of thing for —"

“Yes, yes, no doubt—no doubt,” interrupted the Rector uneasily, not waiting to hear to what it was he was giving his assent, but only anxious to make some excuse for his daughter’s speedy departure; “quite probably you are right, Mrs. Forrester, but still—still”—he laid his hand on Eva’s arm, —“Eva, my dear, go home, dear—go home. I expect dinner might be waiting—mightn’t it, dear? Rather early, perhaps, but still—it might—don’t you think?”

Never in all the days of his fifteen years’ sojourn in Abbotslea, had the Rector been known to be able to make an excuse. He ought to have given up trying long ago. His attempts were always such palpable failures; Eva had laughingly told him so many times. This was one of his worst efforts, for it was scarcely half-past eleven in the morning, and all he could think of was,—to tell her to go home and have dinner.

Mrs. Forrester, however, did not see the absurdity of the reason given; she only clutched at the opening for a little further comment.

“In *my* opinion, Mr. Gambray,” she said

imperiously, moving a step from the Rector, and glancing at intervals from his face to Eva's slight, retreating figure, "that girl of yours *ought* to have been helping you in the parish for some years now. If you had taken *my* advice, you would have knocked all that silly school-girl shyness out of her, and brought her forward to be your right-hand. You should have sent her to a good finishing school, where they would have polished her up, and straightened her figure, and —"

"Thank you—thank you—very likely—very nice," interrupted the Rector confusedly; "but—but she's delicate, you know, Mrs. Forrester. Eva's a good girl—very good girl; in fact—in fact, I might say she's everything I could wish her to be—everything."

By the time the Rector concluded his sentence, he had compassed quite a firm voice, and was able to turn a brave face upon his adviser. Some people had said that they were certain that beneath Mr. Gambray's heavy red and grey moustache lay a weak mouth, for there was no other sign of



irresolution in his face, from the broad brow to the steady chin; and yet, his character often showed a gentleness that bordered upon docility and indecision.

“Opinions differ,” remarked Mrs. Forrester distantly, with just so much contempt in her voice that politeness and high-breeding allowed, “and it’s certainly fortunate they do, and —”

“Um—um—ah!” murmured the Rector, looking lovingly at the turn in the path round which Eva had just disappeared, “I’m glad they do.”

He was thinking that if others didn’t think as highly of Eva as he did himself, there would be the more chance for him to keep her with him all the remaining years of his life,—which was the desire of his heart. Mrs. Forrester, however, thought he had misunderstood her, and so went through the trouble of explaining herself more clearly and more lengthily.

“I said,—opinions differed, Mr. Gambray,” she said, drawing up her head and speaking with a still more distinct and marked utterance, “and it’s a good thing they do,

because if your daughter were everything that could be wished, the standard of manners, and appearance, and *toute ensemble* wouldn't be very high. People *do* say—say, well, I scarcely like to tell you what they say, Mr. Gambray—I don't really."

"No matter, Mrs. Forrester, no matter," answered the Rector, genially, "don't trouble yourself on that account, pray don't. Another time will do just as well,—indeed it will."

Other people held that Mr. Gambray's invariable good-nature and mildness, were the outcome of a nobler and further-sighted nature than was usual to men.

"Another time,—Mr. Gambray?" repeated Mrs. Forrester, lightly laying her delicately-gloved hand upon his arm, and looking full at him as she spoke. "Then the rumour *isn't* true? I *thought* not—I *said* not—I have told *everyone* I have met that it *isn't* true—that it's *too bad* of them to attribute such an unwarrantable move to you. I asked them,—was it likely that you, a clergyman in good health and still with many years of —"

"Yes, yes,—I'm not broken down yet, I know I'm not,—very kind of you to say so,—

to point it out so delicately, Mrs. Forrester," interrupted the Rector, anxiously drawing off a little, and looking studiously away, "but you see it—it —"

"*I* always uphold those who do their duty," said Mrs. Forrester piously; "though, of course, no one could say but what mistakes have been made parochially at times, which wouldn't have happened if advice—good advice that was given—had been taken. And then people have been always rather inclined to say that your sermons in Church were—were very excellent, and all very well in their way, but still they are a little dull, and rather—same; not that *I* should like to go so far as to say *that*, Mr. Gambray—"

Mrs. Forrester had brought her sentence to no logical conclusion. Her sentences often contained so many important details and parentheses, that the real point about them was forgotten. At this place, she paused significantly for the Rector's approval of her moderation and loyalty.

But simple, single-minded as the Rector was, he was yet aware—he could scarcely

help being so after so many years—that Mrs. Forrester's "people say," or "they say," was the kernel, of what she had first created and spread abroad. She often affected a lofty disdain of what she repeated under the title of "people say." This, however, was a little harmless habit of hers, which was understood and appreciated to its full value by those who knew her. The Rector understood Mrs. Forrester a little, more than she knew, or than any around her had any idea of, but still not sufficiently.

He was rather disturbed in his mind just now, for evidently his excellent parishioner was bent upon misinterpreting his words, either on purpose or by accident. But whether it were one or the other—either was embarrassing enough.

"You are very kind—very lenient to—to me," stammered he, standing still and facing Mrs. Forrester; "but, indeed, it's—it's *quite* true, the—the people have not made a—a —"

"True—? true—, Mr. Gambray?" interrupted the lady, moving backwards gracefully, with her hands upheld in righteous horror, and



her eyes turned away with would-be dramatic effect; “no mistake in the rumour? Impossible! You are—are joking, Mr. Gambray—you must be,—not that *I* think it correct to joke upon *such* subjects, for it’s no joking matter when a Rector has it rumoured about him that in the midst of life and health, he is thinking of deserting his —”

“I have reasons, Mrs. Forrester,” broke in the Rector, with some dignity, for there were times when the doubt would arise as to whether his mouth were cut in a weak form or no—“private reasons,—which every man has a right to possess, and especially in a move of this kind, the decision for which must rest with himself.”

For the moment, Mrs. Forrester was taken aback. She silently gazed at Mr. Gambray’s fine, composed face, and wondered at his courage in addressing *her* thus. Then, her indignation broke forth and got the better of her judgment. To her mind, Mr. Gambray’s gravest offence did not lie in his decision to give up his living and *desert his flock*—as she called it—, *but* in his presumption and folly in not first asking *her* advice about it, and in

not first obtaining her leave and sanction for it.

“It’s a disgraceful thing — perfectly scandalous, I call it,” she said indignantly, not particular as to the application of her epithets, but only intent upon showing how great was her grievance, “to think that it should be allowed in the Church of England, for the clergymen to leave their duty and their work, just when they fancy. They should only leave, in *my* opinion, when their parishioners advise them to, and not before. It’s not for *them* to go and do what they like about it. And you,—of all people, Mr. Gambray—you, a widower, with no wife to tell you what’s the right and proper thing to —”

“I should be obliged if you would spare me any reference to my dear wife,” broke in the Rector, rather hoarsely.

Though it was some years since her death, he could not, even yet, face having her name brought up in the course of ordinary conversation.

“And with only a raw, badly-educated girl in your home,” continued Mrs. Forrester,

with increasing wrath. "It is not as if you were a man with a large family, and you wanted to give them educational advantages, and so you thought it best to travel, or settle in London;—there's no excuse like *that* for you,—not that that would be a sufficient excuse either. But for *you*, in *your* position, to think of — Mr. Gambray, it's simply ridiculous! Why, pray, didn't you come and ask *my* advice about it,—it would have been *very* different then."

"Very likely, very likely," murmured the Rector, coughing slightly as he spoke, to hide the amusement he felt at Mrs. Forrester's unvarnished avowal. "But then, if I had laid my proposition before my parishioners, there might have been some difficulty connected with it,—that of variance of opinion, for instance."

"Variance of opinion indeed!" repeated the lady scornfully; "as if you couldn't depend upon *me*, Mr. Gambray, to have pointed out to you which was the best. There would have been no question about the matter,—*I* would have made it plain for you. I have always said, Mr. Gambray, and

many have agreed with me, too, that in your position as a widower and clergyman, it would have been much more becoming if you had consulted *me*, upon a great many more matters than you have done. *Others* would have taken offence and withdrawn all their subscriptions long before now, if they had been me—I have heard them say so; but *I* wouldn't, because it would have been against—against my *Christian principles*.”

“Indeed, I'm very sorry, if there has been any—um, um—neglect on my part,” said the Rector mildly, beginning to wonder how he could conclude the conversation, and get away; “but I thought I had always been most—most careful in all matters where you were connected—”

“Really,—I scarcely know whether to take what you are saying as a compliment, or as an insult,” she interrupted haughtily, “I think people should always speak plainly—I do.”

That “I do,” was the criterion of what was right, evidently.

“It would be as well if I—I reconsidered my—um, um—” continued the Rector, heed-



less of the interruption; “so, perhaps, if you’ll excuse me, I’ll—I’ll wish you a very good morning, Mrs. Forrester.—A wonderfully fine day it is, is it not? The farmers will be rejoicing in such a summer as we are —”

“Are you going straight back to the Rectory, Mr. Gambray?” inquired Mrs. Forrester, steadfastly refusing his outstretched hand, and maintaining a much-aggrieved intonation of voice.

“I don’t—don’t know exactly,” replied the Rector, with some hesitation.

Then a happy thought struck him.

“Which way are *you* going, Mrs. Forrester?” he asked, genially.

“Whichever way my *duty* leads me, Mr. Gambray,” she answered, severely.

“Very good,—very right,—most excellent,” he murmured, withdrawing from her as he spoke. “If everyone regarded duty in the same steady light that you do, Mrs. Forrester, then I think —”

“That *you*, for one, Mr. Gambray, would not be turning your back upon your duty as you are doing now,” she concluded trium-

phantly, preparing to follow the Rector whichever way he was going to take, as she had plenty more to say to him. *Her* duty was not finished yet.

But the Rector's head was bared, as, with a courteous bow, he said —

“I wish you good-morning again, Mrs. Forrester,—our ways, I think, lie in an opposite direction.”

The hint was too evident to be disregarded. The Rector made his way back to the Church again, and Mrs. Forrester—with her head held high, and all her plumage much ruffled by, what she considered, his insult in not wishing for her company—retreated down the church pathway.

“I deserved that hit,” said the Rector, to himself. “My bit of soft speaking, or satire,—whichever way she chose to take it—brought its own reward. Ah! me,—the straightest path would always be the best if—if—”

But the Rector sometimes omitted to finish his sentences. When difficulties arose, he was apt to wander unconsciously off into other channels of thought.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE CHILDREN'S GARDEN.

“WILL I dig how deep, Enie?”

“Only a little way, Robin. It's so hot, and Mother said —”

“Will I dig wight down—down to Astwa—Austwaly?”

“Down to Australia, Robin? How could you do that? It isn't *under* the earth.—What *are* you thinking about?”

“Doesn't you know, Enie, Muvver said that if—if—if a big stick was hammered wight into Wobbin's garden, as deep—as deep as ever it shall go, it would come to—to—other little boys' gardens in Austwa—ly. Do you know—”

A profound pause.

“What, Robin?” asked Enid, stopping in the middle of her weeding, and looking expectantly at her little, round, pinafores brother. She felt sure he was going to say

something funny, that she could tell father about.

“Do you know what Wobbin are going to do, Enie?” said the little fellow confidentially, leaning on his baby spade, and gazing with wide and wondering eyes down into the little hole he was digging; “Wobbin’s going to dig a big, big hole, big as—as—what’s vewy big, Enie?”

“The house is *rather* big, I think, Robin,” answered his sister dubiously, scarcely knowing what kind of bigness he wanted.

“No, no,—me doesn’t mean big *all* ways, but only—big *long*;—doesn’t you know, Enie? a kind of ‘*penthil*’ box long, only more longer. Long as fwom—fwom—here, wight over to—to—here.”

Robin toddled off to a neighbouring seat, to measure the length he wished to explain.

“Only more longer still,” he panted, coming back to his little spade, and looking expectantly into the hole again, to see if it had grown any bigger since he left it.

“I can’t think what’s as long as that—thin,—Robin,” said Enid, thoughtfully, “except, perhaps, a bit of Father’s string.”



“That’s wather vewy thin, arn’t it, Enie?” asked the little boy in doubt, looking round and round to see if he couldn’t see something, that explained what he wished to even better. “Wobbins wanted a thing as would be thin as me one part, and thin as me leg other part, but *long*, long as—as Favver’s bit of cotton.”

“What for, Robin?” questioned Enid, leaving her plot of garden, and coming to him, to look down into his little hole with him.

“Wobbins thought me’d like to go down it *meself*,” said Robin, in an awestruck voice, letting one of his sturdy feet drop into his shallow digging; “then if—if Muvver wouldn’t mind, Wobbins would like just to—to go down the big,—long,—thin hole, and see the other little boys’ gardens in—in Austwaly. Does you think Muvver ould cwiy if Wobbins went, Enie?”

The question was asked very anxiously.

The little fellow felt almost afraid of his own thought, about going down his hole to Australia to see the other little boys’ gardens, and rather hoped Enid would say

that mother would cry, because then he needn't go, though he had said he would.

Enid was a great deal wiser than her little five-year-old brother, and knew that Robin would never be able to dig right through the earth. But she loved Robin's strange, little thoughts and wishes, and with her sweet, motherly care for him, she always let him keep his baby illusions, thinking to herself that when he got as old as she was, he would know better.

"I don't think Mother would like you to go for long, Robin," she answered, bringing her fair, delicate face down on a level with his, and looking tenderly into the grave blue eyes; "and I, Robin,—what do you think I would do, if you went down and stayed there a long time?"

"Me doesn't know, Enie, weally," said the little fellow earnestly, putting his arms round her neck, and trying to speak in a whisper, as though it were a great secret. "Tell me,—will you—will you cwy, like Muvver?"

"I'd cry on my fiddle, Robin," answered Enid excitedly, her face flushing. "I'd ask

Mr. Humbert to teach me how to cry all the time on it, until you came back. O, Robin, I *love* Mr. Humbert, and I *love* my new fiddle, but I love you the *best of all*. You mustn't go down the hole to Australia—*never*."

The little boy unclasped his hands, and looked wonderingly at Enid. It was seldom that the self-possessed, demure little maid spoke like that. Robin felt he couldn't understand it at all.

"Don't cwy now, Enie," said he soothingly, looking at the two great tears that were trembling upon Enid's long eyelashes; "Wobbin won't go not—not until he has dig a hole big enough for Muvver and Favver and Enie and me—and—and—"

"Nobody else, Robin?"

"Yes, yes, Enie," cried he, toddling away from his garden to the soft turf close by; "one—two more—Mr. Fowwest, and your—your Mr. Humble, Enie. Hip—hip—hip—"

A pause.

"What comes next, Enie, after hip?"

"Hurrah, Robin."

"Hip, hip, huwah," shouted the little fellow, dancing round and round, and clap-

ping his hands, "Mr. Fowwest and Mr. Humble, and Muvver and Favver and Enie, and Mr. Humble, and — "

But the second round of names came to an abrupt termination. Round, pinafores Robin had lost his balance, and had come with a bump and a roll to the ground.

Enid ran to him.

"It are loverly, loverly, loverly," chuckled the little rolling ball of pinafore, and fair, tumbled hair.

"What's lovely? Tumbling?"

"No, no, kicking; but—but—"

A whimper.

"It did hurt Wobbin tumberling, only—I'se forgot—forgot where. Feel me knee, Enie."

Enid gently felt the knee that was supposed to be hurt, but notwithstanding the gravely puckered face of Robin during the process, there was no wincing.

He began rolling and kicking again.

"It's loverly—loverly, Enid," he panted again; "come and kick too."

"But I don't seem to like kicking and rolling about like you do," said his sister,



rather ruefully ; “ but, Robin ”—a flood of light bathing her face—“ I love fiddling, and Mr. Humbert will soon, very soon be here.”

“ I’ll teach fiddlerling with Mr. Humble,” said Robin graciously.

He always muddled up the words “ teach ” and “ learn ; ” they generally exchanged places in his sentences.

“ Let’s try and get cool before he comes,” suggested Enid, collecting her tools together, and looking from time to time at Robin, to see how much hotter he was getting by rolling.

“ Take me pinner off,” said Robin, struggling, notwithstanding, to get it off himself, “ and—and then— ”

“ What shall we do then, Robin ? ” asked Enid, carefully folding up the crumpled pinafore as she spoke.

“ You tell me a stordy, and me tell you a stordy, Enie,” cried the little fellow, looking proudly down at his white frock and gay sash, which had all been hidden beneath the large overall pinafore, “ and then—what does you think ? ”

He paused, with his head set well on one

side, and looked wisely at his sister, patting his two chubby hands together, as he did so.

“Mr. Humbert will be here by then,” said Enid.

“No, no, Mr. Humbert won't—won't,” cried Robin, confidently, “not then, not till you and me has told one stordy all together. Both to both, Enie.”

“Perhaps he won't come till then,” said Enid, giving in, with a big-drawn child's sigh. She would have liked him to come now, that very moment. But Robin wanted “stories,” so perhaps she would forget her own want in supplying his.

“Come and let's sit in Father's big garden chair under the tree,” she said, taking Robin's hand and leading him across the smooth level turf to the further end of it, which lay shadowed by a great oak tree.

“Both to both in Favver's chair,” chuckled Robin, trying to take big strides with his baby legs,—“telling both to both big stordies.”

And so, hand in hand, the two children arrived at ‘father's chair.’ It was a large, low, lounging one, room enough in it for more

than two children, with their little legs and tiny rounded forms.

Ah ! sweet innocent children, telling their little thoughts and stories to each other ! What would God's fair, fair earth be, without the music of children's voices and the wisdom of children's prattle, and the dearness of children's love ? Thank God for those precious gifts that He gives not grudgingly.

It was one of those lovely early evenings of June. The day had been hot, almost sultry at noontide ; but, late in the afternoon, there had sprung up a light breeze,—a kind, sweet breeze, which softly fanned the flagging flowers and invited them to lift their drooping heads, and drink in fresh life and beauty. Each breath of passing air was scent laden,—intoxicating in its sweetness. Every bloom seemed revelling in its own particular beauty, every colour was most perfect in its hue, and every form most rare and matchless in its symmetry. June is ever lavish ;—she seems to pet and spoil her countless, peerless blossoms ; she seems to take possession of all the sweetest, brightest, most radiant of flowers,

and tend them with tenderest care, bathing them with the freshness of early spring, clothing them in dazzling hues, and steeping them deep in lotus perfume.

The Trevors' garden was one of those old-fashioned, untrimmed gardens, where the soil was rich and kind, and all the flowers grew and flourished in it from year to year. It would have shocked the nice, skilled gardeners, who love to see each flower in its own exact place, and each shade of colour most carefully planned to dovetail in with those other shades of colour, which must lie close by. When every tender blossom must keep within a certain compass, and not shoot forth in its exuberant life to mar the neatness of the line of path. It is not right that they should pass beyond a certain point,—if they do, they must suffer for it; the sweet bloom must be nipped, its life must pay the penalty for its desire to stretch beyond its sister-blooms. But in the Trevors' garden, the flowers and shrubs grew mostly as they wished; only now and again came a pruning hand, and that not a very experienced one,—so, perhaps, all the gentler for its inexperience.



"Let us have the garden wild and sweet, Arthur," Mrs. Trevor had said to her husband that day, when together they had come over to inspect the house and grounds to see if they would suit them, "let us have it all luxuriant with roses and honeysuckle, and sweet william and mignonette, and all that is bright and trailing and scented, so that when you come home from your work, Arthur, you may find it all fair with loveliest flowers and—"

"Nothing can be fairer to me than my own wife and our sweet bairns," Arthur Trevor had interrupted, stooping to kiss his little wife, who was more precious to him than all else besides, "*you* make our home fair, Marion."

"Do I, Arthur?" she had said softly in return, laying her two hands upon his shoulders, and turning her sweet smiling face up to his, "and you, dear, make it sweetest of all to me. But shan't we have it all fair around about us, with God's own beautiful flowers, too? Flowers and bairns,—they grow so well together, Arthur."

"Dear, it shall be as you like best," he

had answered, "we will have it wild and sweet-scented as you say, and no one shall keep it in order except ourselves. A garden with so many turns and nooks, so many sloping bits of turf and moss, and so much variety of shrub, will look best with flowers growing everywhere and anyhow. And we can see to that, can't we, Marion?"

"Yes, Arthur; that is just what I should like. Only, we must keep a boy to do the kitchen-garden, because we are not wise enough to understand the vegetable department. And then you see—"

And so, on they had talked of their arrangements, when the move should be made, which would transport them from their little town-house, surrounded by its other same-looking houses and straight ugly streets, to the pretty country villa which lay on the outskirts of Abbeyslea, in the midst of its sloping garden and many trees.

The few people who knew the Trevors intimately, and the world outside a little,—would chaff them for their never-ending courtship. To think that they,—an old married couple of over ten years' standing,—

should be to each other as much and more than they were in those first early days, when just before the altar they had vowed to love, obey, and serve each other. But they together had learnt an answer, which made friends go on their way more thoughtfully, surprised that, in the common round of practical life, any two people should be so mad as to fulfil a poet's vision of life. To think they should find it possible to hold that—

“ In true marriage lies  
Nor equal, nor unequal ; each fulfils  
Defect in each, and always thought in thought,  
Purpose in purpose, will in will, they grow,—  
The single, pure and perfect animal,  
The two-celled heart beating with one full stroke,  
—Life,”

That he should turn, and smiling say to her—

“ Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself,  
Lay thy sweet hands in mine, and trust to me.”

And she make answer—

“ In that I live, I love ; because I love,  
I live.”

which perhaps is the only key-note of many women's lives, and the explanation of much

that seems—to some, most foolish and weak in them, but—to others most winning and sweet.

Thus it came about that, when the Trevors took possession of this house with its rambling garden, the flowers and shrubs grew together all unchecked and wild, with only now and again a changing and richening of the soil, to give the roots fresh growth; and only upon whiles, the cutting back and training up by hands that knew little of any scientific way, and so only touched gently, so as least to spoil or alter the appearance.

—In a sweet shaded spot, which lay within view of the drawing-room windows of the house, had been parcelled out a little plot of ground called “the children’s garden.” Here it was that Robin dug his shallow holes with his baby spade, and thought in time to dig right through the earth to the countries on the other side of it; and here it was that Enid weeded busily and tended and watered her flowers, while she dreamed and thought of her new friend and Master and her fiddle. For, since that night, when it was doubtful as



to whether Dr. Sinclair had not made a mistake, in asking that the delicate child should sit up and hear some of Franz Humbert's wild and plaintive music, — there had come about, at first, a kind of tacit arrangement, but later on, as it had seemed to succeed so well, a settled one, that Franz Humbert should look upon little Enid Trevor as his pupil. Strangely enough,—after that long dead faint, which had seemed as if it would never end, as if the natural flow of blood and life would never return,—there had come very slowly, yet perceptibly, to the loving, anxious eyes around her, a certain increase of strength and robustness to Enid's feeble constitution. The child's request to possess that “vibrating instrument” and the desire to learn from that wonderful gentleman, who had touched it and played upon it, as if he were loving it and as if it were alive,—had been granted her.

“Give her what she asks for,” had been Dr. Sinclair's advice; “some natures have such strong instincts, such all-devouring desires, that it is death to them to deny what their souls *must* have. These natures

and constitutions are not the ones that require medicines, and treatments, and doctor's care, for everything affects them mentally and morally, not physically. The child, herself, has discovered what will bring her new life and health, and she asks you for it. It is not a matter of *spoiling* to give these natures the few things for which they ask, because they are so formed and constructed, that what they ask for, they really need for their growth and health. You either stunt or kill, if you deny. Your little girl does not want any doctoring further than advice;—I give you mine, which I think you will do well to take.”

Dr. Sinclair had sometimes to study human nature in connection with his physician's work;—otherwise, his success would not have been so marked. His subtle insight into hidden causes and effects, had given to his name a wider renown than simply that of his skill in physics. He seemed to see far deeper down into the reasons of the *wherefore*, and to be able to propose a not always strict physician's remedy for the *why*, which, nevertheless, had the unfailing virtue

of proving the cure, for what had seemed to baffle all other attempts. Thus, strangely inconsistent was Dr. Sinclair's own nature. He hated Man, yet he had the power within him of more finely understanding Man, than most men about him. He refused to see the reasons and explanations for many of men's doings; and yet, when he let his thoughts bear upon them and their natures, though nominally only in a physician's light, he could solve problems, and prove equal to enigmas, which demanded more of wisdom than that possessed by an ordinary man of his profession.

The Trevors took Dr. Sinclair's advice, unhesitatingly. And, well they did so. The fragile, pallid child, with her wild flushes of emotion and many sleepless nights, grew quieter and more at rest, with her new possession and interest. The large, dark eyes that had at times, before, looked almost preternaturally bright and large in the thin little face, seemed to lose their hungry, longing gaze; the marks beneath them vanished, and the cheeks grew rounder and less colourless. All the spare moments that were not

given to Robin, or to doing little things "that Mother liked," did the child bestow upon her instrument. It was to her a source of ceaseless pleasure and discovery; for, though, as yet, it was all new to her, still the sympathy that existed between the child and the 'beauty of sound,' was so close and profound, that the difficulties that ever surround this most living of instruments, seemed to grow less in her case. The mother, though unmusical and scarcely understanding how satisfying to her child's nature was this new companion, yet watched with delight and surprise the gradual change in health and spirits, that every day grew more evident. But, instinctively, Enid fled to her father whenever he was at home, to show and explain to him the results of fresh exertions; for, however sweet and sympathetic her mother ever was in all things, still the little girl had the innate knowledge that, in this thing,—in this love of music and sound,—her father would understand best.

But, great as was this passion that seemed as a new life-giving sap to little Enid's nature,—Robin, her baby-brother, still always



came first in her thoughts. Thus, as the two children lay back in father's great lounging chair, Enid's whole mind was given to telling Robin a story that he would like, if possible, more than all the others she had ever told him before. Only now and again did she find herself thinking about Mr. Humbert, and wondering whether it were not nearly time for him to come.

—At length, both having told their stories, it was time to begin the one that was to be told both together. This was quite a plan of Robin's own; they had never thought of it, or tried it before.

“How shall us does it, Enie?” asked Robin wonderingly. He often found his own thoughts and devices too big for him, single-handed.

“Well,” said Enid, slowly and thoughtfully “we mustn't try and tell all at the same time, because—because we *couldn't*.”

Even Enid found Robin's proposition rather a hard one this time.

“Shall Wobbin say one word and then Enie another one?” suggested Robin gravely, “and then Wobbin another one, and Enie another one, and Wobbin another —”

How children *love* reiteration ! How many times would they not repeat over and over again, so as to convey their little meanings, as they think, quite clearly, if it were not that they are always interrupted in their baby methods, by someone who understands *before* they get to the real end of their lucid explanations !

“ P’raps,”—interrupted Enid, knitting her delicately marked brows, “ p’raps,—that would be one way, a very nice way, Robin, but supposing—supposing we just think of another and see which is best.”

Somehow she fancied, that they wouldn’t be able to get on very fast with a story if they told it like that. But she didn’t want little Robin to know that she was afraid his plan wouldn’t succeed. She never damped him if she could help it, for she couldn’t bear to see his round, chubby face fall with disappointment. So she put it thus gently.

Robin thought he could think better if he untucked himself out of father’s chair, and took a roll on the grass.

“ Shall I’se has a kick, Enie,—first, for to

help us tell it best way?" he asked, scrambling on to his feet.

"O no,—Robin," cried Enid, alarmed, jumping up too, "what would Mother say, if you got your frock all green? She'd —"

"Her wouldn't cwy," broke in Robin stoutly, looking round and round to see what else he could do, as he might not roll and kick just then.

Enid laughed.

"What a funny boy you are, Robin," she began, "you think that —"

"Enie, Enie," shouted he, toddling away from her as fast as his fat legs would take him, "Wobbin sees Mr. Humble—Mr. Humble, Enie, he's got his wellow, wellow hair on, Wobbin will teach fid—fid—fiddlerling with Mr. Wellow-hair."

Enid looked up.

Stepping from one of the low French windows of the drawing-room, she saw the figure of her violin master. He had his usual light coloured boots on, that seemed always to be catching some gleam, and to look lighter and longer and more conspicuous than they really were. His head

was bare, showing his yellow hair, which shone like wrought gold in the sunlight, as he half-turned back. Enid could just see that her mother was standing inside the window, and—close by her, but further in,—was another lady. She could not tell who it was, but she guessed it must be some visitor, making a rather late call, as the day had been so hot.

Smoothing her dress down and straightening her sash, as even *little* girls will do, before they show themselves to anyone who does not belong to the home circle,—Enid hastened forward.

“I’m so glad he’s come at last,” she said, half aloud, with a great satisfied sigh.

There were two sets of steps,—rough, uneven steps cut in the turf, which helped to reduce the sharp slant down just below the house. Then came the nearly level piece of grass, bordered by flowers and shrubs and shaded by several well-grown trees. At the end of this stretch of lawn, grew the great oak tree beneath which “father’s chair” always stood. Beyond this came turns and bye-ways in the garden, and all those parts that do not belong to a ‘lawn proper.’



Enid heard the ringing, gleeful laugh that was her master's peculiar sign of content and happiness, as—with a low inclination of the head—he turned from the window, shoved on his great, broad-brimmed, much squashed grey hat, and began a rapid descent.

“Mother's not coming out with him,” thought she, with a quake of fear and shyness seizing her, “what shall I do?”

“Mr. Humble, Mr. Humble,” shouted Robin, bundling along as fast as he could. “Wobbin's coming to teach fid—fidderling.”

But the violinist did not see the round, sturdy figure, or—apparently—hear the baby voice. He was bent upon finding his little pupil, and this alone occupied his mind.

“Fairy, Fairy,” he exclaimed, seeing her coming towards him. “Come, they have made me late, we have only—only—”

Fortunately at this point, to be precise, he stopped to take out his watch and look at it. Otherwise, he would heedlessly have knocked over the baby boy, who was within a yard's length of him.

“Only fifty-three and a half minutes, Fairy,” he finished, standing on the last turf

step of the lower set, and speaking in a complaining voice.

“You never saw Robin, Mr. Humbert,” remarked Enid, with gentle reproof, “and you *might* have knocked him over.”

He started and looked down close to him.

“Only fifty-three and a half minutes, Fairy,” he said again, stooping to pat Robin’s head,—“she *made* me late,—she did.”

“Who did?” asked Enid. “Mother?”

“No, no,” answered the violinist, almost sharply, and frowning as if he were recalling something not altogether pleasant, “it was the other—the beautiful lady with the—the loud, talking voice.”

“Cawwy me, Mr. Wellow-hair—please cawwy me. I’s so tired,” pleaded Robin, holding up his fat arms pathetically.

“I don’t know how,” said the violinist helplessly, looking at Enid, “but I’ll try, if you like.”

“I’ll stwoke you wellow hair, Mr. Humble,” promised Robin, graciously, “if you cawwies me.”

## CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. FORRESTER.

Is it an accident of nature or a small vice, that some people are gifted with ‘imagination untutored by reason?’ Is it a thing excusable that, in their hands, truth becomes untruth, untruth becomes truth,—right becomes wrong, and wrong becomes right? Is it a matter for condemnation or admiration, that what they say, be it only upon the most ordinary of matter, must first be sifted, altered, and metamorphosed, before any grain of veracity can be found in it? Is it to be deplored or only smiled at, that they themselves are, seemingly, so unconscious of their fatal propensity? And—finally, once having felt the charm of giving their imaginations full play, is there any earthly possibility or probability, that anything will ever again induce them to draw in the reins?

A few of the people of Abbeyslea,—those

who occasionally found time to think,—allowed their minds to be afflicted by questions such as these, in reference to Mrs. Forrester. She was a lady who, both from her position and from the important part that she nominally took in everything that concerned everybody, provoked a good deal of attention in all ways. Many misunderstood her words, ways, and actions entirely. It was not stupidity on their part, that prevented them seeing in her character traits that made others fear and wonder at her,—but it was, rather, a guileless inability to comprehend what was entirely foreign to their own natures. This was unfortunate in one way, not to themselves so much as to her, for it served as a means for continually raising her still higher in her own opinion.

Mrs. Forrester, in *her* mind's eye, was never in the wrong, never made a mistake, never wished to undo what she had done, and thus, apparently, never had need of the confession that she confessed every week, so humbly and meritoriously. She had not always been like this. In years gone by, she had been, perhaps, more self-satisfied than



was wise, more domineering than became her as a woman, more skilled in taking crooked ways than in keeping to the straight, and more inclined to under-rate everyone else's methods and doings, than to under-rate her own. But the beautiful, brilliant woman, that John Forrester had married fourteen years ago, had other points in her than these,—good ones, that had as fair a chance to grow and bring forth fruit, as the bad ones had. She had been endowed with a mind singularly clear and delicately balanced, combined with a quick, womanly instinct, that might have given her an influence widespread for good. She had possessed a sweet and honeyed tongue, which could have been used to soothe and bless and comfort those around her. And greater still,—she had been divinely given a nature, with such a strange encircling charm and power to draw in it, that she could have been a queen amongst women,—inspiring, ennobling, moulding for right. But alas! there is in every human being a gravitation towards evil, a bias towards degeneracy. The gifts God gave her so lavishly, were

misused and abused; the beautiful possibilities He put before her, were ignored. The nature, that in His Hands and under the direction of His Will, would have been a fine and elevating one, became under her own supremacy one to be feared, shrunk from, and avoided. Her very virtues became as vices; her very powers as weaknesses.

Mrs. Trevor was not amongst those women, who were unable to see through the double parts in Mrs. Forrester's character. She was a plain, practical little woman, able in her own mind to call things by their right names, and to give to actions their true value. She seldom cared to tender opinions or advice to her circle of acquaintances, but whenever she felt, from sense of honour, obliged to do so, it was always with a gentleness and width of thought, invariably leaving the impression, that what she said had been spoken rightly, and only with true charity of feeling. She did not hold that she was placed in the world to condemn the world. She had never found it a part of her woman's duties and privileges, to judge or to be hard upon those others around her. She had never discovered

it a pleasure to be spiteful. She never saw the charm of settling other people's affairs for them, or of thrusting herself forward in matters that had nothing to do with her. She knew that people had a strange way of thinking to improve upon truth, by adding something from their own imaginations to it; she knew that thus truth became untruth, and right became wrong,—but, it never occurred to her, that she would like to do this herself.

As Mrs. Trevor's house lay so far from all the others in the parish, she came in for a less frequent round of calls, than would otherwise have been her share. However, just at the juncture of the Reverend George Gambray's departure from Abbeyslea, Mrs. Forrester thought it possible, that "that quiet, homely Mrs. Trevor" might not have heard the news. So, strictly from a sense of "duty," she made the effort to walk out as far as Mrs. Trevor's house, in the cool of the early evening of that same hot day, which had found Enid and Robin in the garden, waiting for the arrival of Franz Humbert.

About a quarter of a mile before she reached her destination, she was overtaken by the violinist, hurrying along, regardless of heat, in his usual wild, erratic way. He was rather vexed and put out, at having to slacken speed in order to conform his steps to those of Mrs. Forrester, and several times attempted to leave her and hasten on alone. But the lady preferred his company, and so would not let him go. The violinist's open look of admiration, whenever his eyes fell upon her beautiful blonde face, was, perhaps, sufficient in itself to make her wish to keep him by her,—however difficult it was to carry on any ordinary or consecutive conversation.

But whatever topic she had found to speak on, there must have been in it something of a ruffling nature; for when they arrived at the door of Mrs. Trevor's home, there was a flush of angry colour upon the violinist's sensitive face, and his great purple eyes were dark and flashing, as—forgetful of all ceremony—he noisily pushed open the hall door and entered, calling out his pupil's name in quick, impatient tones as he did so.



Mrs. Trevor, who had been watching the movements of her children from the drawing-room window, heard the noise and call, and, laughing as she thought of how true were some of Dr. Sinclair's remarks upon the strangeness of the violinist's ways, she hastened out to meet him.

She was rather taken aback at finding that outside the door, in dignified silence, stood Mrs. Forrester, evidently regarding Franz Humbert's free and easy entrance, as a distinct breach of all society's laws, and, therefore, a thing much to be resented. But Mrs. Trevor, with her sweet grace and courtesy of manner, in a moment seemed to soothe the ruffled violinist, and even Mrs. Forrester, in entering, refrained from expressing her opinion of what had taken place.

"Enid is out on the lawn, Mr. Humbert," said Mrs. Trevor, turning to him as they entered the drawing-room. "She and Robin have been sitting under the old oak tree at the further end of it, for the last half-hour. If you wouldn't mind, you —"

"I'll go to her—I'll fetch my Fairy," broke in the violinist, springing to the open window.

"I'm late, I know I am; but—but it wasn't my fault."

He looked reproachfully at Mrs. Forrester, who, however, did not deign to look back at him.

"Shall we play together in the school-room, Mrs. Trevor?" he asked gaily, already half-outside.

But he waited for no answer, only gave that tenor gleeful laugh that Enid had heard all down the lawn, and then danced down the steps to meet his little pupil—his Fairy, as he called her.

"Mrs. Trevor, I'm *surprised* to hear about this arrangement of yours," began Mrs. Forrester, in cold, dignified tones, before the last notes of that laugh had died away.

She spoke as if the arrangement—whatever it was—mortally affected her.

"Do you mean about Mr. Humbert giving Enid lessons on the violin?" asked Mrs. Trevor, smiling, and turning her head rather reluctantly away from the window, so that she could not see what was going on outside, but give her full attention to her visitor.

"Yes, I *do*," Mrs. Forrester said, with

marked disapproval in her voice. "I think it a very injudicious thing, to let *any* child have her whims and fancies granted her."

Mrs. Trevor paused a moment before she answered. She seldom spoke very quickly; sometimes, even, she would give her reply just a rapid thought, before she expressed herself in words. She held that so much lay in words, that it was a mistake to trifle with them heedlessly. Mrs. Forrester, however, thought she was trying to make up some excuse.

"Don't you think that the child's mother is the best judge of that?" said the little woman, bending forward, and speaking so gently that the words which, handled otherwise, might have sounded as if she had taken offence and wished to retaliate, seemed only as a soft suggestion.

"Certainly not, Mrs. Trevor," replied her visitor, in not to be disputed tones; "a child's mother is the *worst* judge. It's only outsiders who can see what's right and proper for a child. Of course you like to spoil and pet your children, and give them everything they ask for, just because you are their

mother, and think that's the best way of showing your love for them. But *I* have a *very* different opinion about the matter."

"We all do think so differently, though, don't we?" said Mrs. Trevor, not anxious in any way to enter into an argument. Mrs. Forrester—she thought to herself—has no children of her own, so perhaps it wasn't strange, that she should have such a low idea of a mother's training and love for her children.

"Yes, there *are* different ways of thinking, but there's only one *right* way," answered Mrs. Forrester, folding her hands on her lap as she spoke. "Mothers are all too weak and foolish with their children, that's *my* opinion about it. And it's a very queer thing for you to have this Mr. Humbert here to teach your little girl, when everyone knows that he isn't quite right in his mind, and—"

"Not right in his mind?" interrupted Mrs. Trevor. "Why,—he's as right as you or I are,—only he's a genius, which perhaps we are not, and that's why he is sometimes strange in manner and speech. It would be —"



“I tell you upon good authority, Mrs. Trevor, that that Mr. Humbert isn’t right in his mind,” repeated the fair lady, grandiloquently; “and he’ll make your little girl have fits, or something. Why,—he ought to be shut up, or have a keeper to follow him, for—he’s *quite mad* sometimes. What do you think of his proposing to that Dr. Sinclair’s sister, the very first time he saw her? And then the doctor had words with him,—but they have made it up now, I hear. I tell you he’s *quite mad*!”

Mrs. Forrester’s words and manner implied, that Franz Humbert was nothing less than some dangerous lunatic at large in the land. His proposal to Claire Sinclair was entirely a feature of her own imagination, drawn from something she had heard dropped, of his intimacy with Dr. Sinclair, himself. However, there was no saying but what she thought she was speaking the truth at the time, so ingenious is some people’s reasoning.

But gentle, right-minded Mrs. Trevor’s wrath was roused at this scandalous gossip.

“Mrs. Forrester,” she said, not loudly, but in that excessively quiet voice, that is always

a gentlewoman's way of shewing how hurt and sore she feels, "I cannot allow such ideas and opinions to be expressed in our house. My husband would not like it, and I, myself, cannot bear to hear any one of our friends spoken of, as you have just done of Mr. Humbert. You will not object, I hope, to changing the subject, otherwise —"

"Certainly, Mrs. Trevor,—as you wish it," replied her visitor haughtily, not waiting to hear the alternative, "though in the society to which *I* am accustomed, such a request would *not* have been made . . ."

She paused a moment, and stared full at Mrs. Trevor, waiting for an apology. But it did not come. So she continued,—the desire to repeat some of what she had just said, being too great to resist. Also, she had had some intention from the beginning, of softening it all down a little.

"It was simply as a matter of duty," she said, in rather aggrieved tones, "that I warned you about Mr. Humbert, — as he has just informed me, while we came along together, of your arrangement with him. I did not know of it before to-day, or

I would have given you my advice earlier. Of course he's a very nice man,—and so musical and so uncommon-looking too, that it's quite a treat to meet him sometimes,—only it's a very different thing to give him free access to your house, and allow him to teach your little girl. But now,—that you know about him, you will naturally be anxious to put a stop to all this."

The last sentence was spoken in an interrogative voice, with that look of curiosity passing over the speaker's face, that seemed to come there without her knowledge or wish.

"I do not think that what you have told me of Mr. Humbert will, in any way, lead us to wish to alter our arrangement with him," answered Mrs Trevor, decidedly ;—then she added, smiling as she spoke : " We are such conservative people, — Arthur and I, — you know,—that we don't at all like making changes."

Unfortunately, this proved a fine opening for Mrs. Forrester to commence the topic, expressly for which she was making this call. But the experience she had just had of Mrs. Trevor's unreadiness to hear or approve

of having her friends discussed or spoken against, warned Mrs. Forrester that she must feel her way more carefully, and—though she would not express so much to herself—more judiciously.

“Ah! you don’t like making changes, then?” she remarked carelessly, perhaps quite unconsciously letting her eyes, at that moment, rest upon Mrs. Trevor’s smooth, unfashionably-arranged hair, and then dropping them lower to take in the simple cut of her dress.

“No, indeed we don’t,” answered the little lady, relieved that her visitor seemed really inclined to be interested in something exclusive of Mr. Humbert’s peculiarities, “we prefer sameness in nearly everything. Customs and habits are such singularly restful things, we seldom care to have, or make, changes. Except sometimes, I hope—we do not mind making them for the better.”

“But *some* people make them for the worse,” remarked Mrs. Forrester, slightly shrugging her shoulders at the imbecile possibility of such a thing; “What do you think of our Rector,—for instance?”



Again Mrs. Trevor paused a moment before she answered. She did know about the Rector's decision, having been told a day or two previously by her husband. Therefore, she was not taken entirely by surprise, by Mrs. Forrester's question. But she did wish to weigh her words, so that her reply should be both wise and true. And it is not always easy either to combine the two, or even—under society's laws—to venture to express what is either wise or true.

“I think our Rector knows himself what is best,” she said quietly, looking away from Mrs. Forrester as she spoke, for she felt it a great effort to express any opinion before her, though she knew, in this case, it was right that she should do so.

“But I asked you what *you* thought about his intention and conduct,” repeated Mrs. Forrester, with distinct and slow utterance, determined not to let her off so easily.

“I think, as I have just said, that what the Rector has done, he has done in all probability entirely for the best, both for himself and for his parishioners,” said Mrs. Trevor, in a low voice. “Surely it is not a

matter for us to give our opinions upon. Mr. Gambray is more experienced than we are, and we may be quite sure that he has his own reasons and motives for taking this step. I am very sorry he is leaving Abbeyslea, and I think everyone will be, for he is a most kind-hearted, genial man, and no one about could have a word to say against him."

Mrs. Forrester's blonde face wore a look of scarcely veiled contempt, as she patiently regarded Mrs. Trevor, waiting for her to bring her insane remarks to an end.

"Then you haven't at all a high idea of people's 'duties,' Mrs Trevor," she said, giving a little ripple of laughter to hide the sting of her words. "Why,—if people carried out *your* plan, everyone would do exactly as they liked or fancied, without even thinking what other people would say, or think, or arrange for them.—Did you really, Mrs. Trevor, know what your last words were expressing just now?"

Mrs. Trevor flushed slightly.

"I did, Mrs. Forrester," she said, turning her soft eyes with some surprise upon her visitor.

Mrs. Forrester felt flawed; she had expected her to twist and turn, and get out of what she had said with all speed. Mrs. Trevor was more stupid and obstinate even than she had taken her for. It was no good mincing matters with her, evidently. These stupid, quiet people were always troublesome to deal with.

“Then, I can only say that I am glad I don’t hold *your* ideas,” she said plainly, drawing herself up and towering over the little lady as she spoke. “I’m thankful I don’t,—indeed, I’m thankful I’m not like *many* people, for I should be ashamed to call myself—a Christian, and yet hold the views they do. To think of Mr. Gambray telling me himself, that *I* did my duty, but that there was no need for him to do *his*. What can you say to *that*,—from a clergyman of the Church of England, too?”

Mrs. Trevor made no reply. She did not believe that Mr. Gambray had ever made such a remark.

“And he said a good deal more, that I should be ashamed to repeat,” continued this punctilious Christian, quite hotly, as she

thought of all his sins. "I think he must be quite a *bad man*, Mrs. Trevor,—and I can only feel glad that he is leaving the parish. It's a dreadful thing to think of a man being such a hypocrite, and holding such loose views, and yet —"

"I thought you always upheld the Church and the clergy, Mrs. Forrester," interrupted Mrs. Trevor, trying to raise her voice and wishing that something—aye, anything—would happen that would put a stop to this hateful conversation.

"So I do," answered the regular church-goer and subscriber to all charities, with some severity; "and that's what makes me so indignant to hear of the scandal that there is afloat about it,—I mean —"

Mrs. Forrester was caught in her own meshes. 'Stupid' Mrs. Trevor could scarcely forbear a smile. Luckily, however, the former was spared the humiliation of explaining what she did mean, by a summary interruption.

Outside, was at this moment heard, a great voice inquiring if Mrs. Forrester were here; and on being replied to in the affirmative,



the possessor of it, without delay, made his appearance.

“How d’you do, Mrs. Trevor—how are you?” exclaimed John Forrester, entering, and taking two strides towards where the ladies were seated, while the room seemed swamped by his big presence and voice. “Sorry to break in upon you—sorry to appear in this guise, indeed, I am—ha, ha! Just look at me! ha, ha!—but such a hot day—must keep cool—and I forgot all about my appearance until I got halfway here,—driving, too, because —”

He turned to his wife, and the voice, that had been so big, grew almost gentle, not exactly in its compass, but in its expression and tone.

“Adelaide, dear, I thought you might be tired with your long walk here,—so I brought the little trap for you. But I don’t wish to hurry you, mind,—stay as long as you like, and don’t mind me;—I’ll keep the pony on the move till you’re —”

“How stupid of you, John!” exclaimed his wife irritably, leaning further back in her seat with the air of a martyr; “you

might have known I should wish to walk back in the cool of the evening. Mr. Humbert was going to accompany me, too."

"I'm sorry—very sorry, dear," said the great voice penitently; "but you needn't use the trap, though it's here. I'll drive it back empty; but I did—did think it would be nice if I could have taken you back and saved you tiring yourself. But—it's no matter."

*No matter!* Ah! no,—it never mattered in the least, that she wilfully opposed every thought and care of his for her comfort! It never seemed to occur to her, that she took an almost inhuman delight in wounding him. It never weighed upon her that she was casting from her, as the very dirt beneath her feet, rare and priceless love,—love, that other women would have given up years of their life to possess even for a few hours!

Patient, long-suffering, great-hearted John. This was his life—giving, but never receiving; hoping, but never realizing; waiting in the dark with his love for the light that never came! How bravely he hid the bareness and desolation of his inner life!

How valiantly he went his way, and saw in those other homes, glimpses into the sweetness that was roughly and continuously denied him ! Ah ! if his heart had not been so great, he would have given up long ago. He would have returned snub for snub, grievance for grievance, coldness for coldness, ingratitude for ingratitude. *This* is what most do, when there is no responding love to the love they give. But it was not possible for a man of John Forrester's nature to do this. Having loved once, he *could not* unlove.

And,—she ? There can be no words for her, except—*pity* those women in the world who are like her !

## CHAPTER XV.

“ARE YOU NOT TOO PROUD?”

“I TELL you, Marc,—I don’t only dislike him, but I hate him!”

“Ah! but you forget, Claire, that if you returned to your father’s house, and fell in with his arrangement for you to marry Lambert, you’d get back all the position you have lost in becoming my sister again; and, also,—you would be fairly wealthy. The odds against your staying here are very heavy.”

He was arguing dead against his own opinions and wishes; but, that was only a secondary matter to him just then.

“Why don’t you believe me, Marc, when I tell you that I *hate* position, and I *hate* money; and now I shall go further, because you make me, and I shall say—that I shall *hate* marrying, and I shall never, never marry. So there—are you convinced?”

Claire’s brown eyes flashed across the breakfast table at her brother. Why did



he keep on tormenting her with this same question about Lambert?

“Did you never meet anyone, Claire, whom you would like to marry?” he asked, irrelevantly.

“Yes—no—I mean no—yes, Marc,” she replied, looking down.

“Affirmatives and negatives don’t agree,” he began, drily; then, laughing, added, “Come, Claire, what did you mean by that answer, now?”

“I meant—well, I meant, Marc, that I have seen a man who—if he hadn’t been married, and if he had wanted me to marry him—I *might* have married him,” confessed she grammatically, “if —”

“What, another ‘if’?”

“Yes,—two more. *If* I hadn’t you for a brother, and *if* I hadn’t made up my mind never to marry.”

“Well, and if these ‘ifs’ were done away, who is this individual? Anyone I know, or someone you saw before you came here?” he asked, with some curiosity, for men are not as free from this weakness as they like to make out.

“Do you really want to know, Marc?”

asked she, lifting her straight brows as if in protest.

“ Yes, I do ;—I want to see if there be any resemblance between him and that snob, Lambert,” said he with some violence.

“ Oh ! you shall know, then,” she answered, demurely, but with eyes that would dance as she spoke, “ it’s Mr. Forrester—John, as you all call him. *I* should like to call him—John.”

Marcus Sinclair leant back in his chair and laughed outright. Claire joined in. This was the first time they had had a good laugh together, since that hateful visit of Lambert’s, which had seemed to set everything awry. No,—there was certainly no resemblance between that cool, dandified Lambert Islay and the great, warm-hearted, much loved John Forrester. If Claire liked a man of John Forrester’s type, she was not likely to admire anyone his direct opposite.

“ But do you know, Claire,” her brother felt himself called upon to say, as soon as the amusement had somewhat subsided, “ you shouldn’t like John Forrester and wish to call him ‘ John.’ The world doesn’t allow of this feeling.”

“Why?—I don’t see why I shouldn’t,” she replied perversely; “nice men must be liked, and there’s no harm in my wanting to call him ‘John,’ because I am quite sure there are some people in the world who ought always to be called by their Christian names, because—they suit them so well. I think it’s quite *idiotic* to call him Mr. Forrester when his name’s—‘John.’”

“Well, don’t forget yourself and come out with ‘John’ one day by mistake,” said he gravely, “for, unfortunately, you can get into much more trouble by being unnaturally natural, than naturally unnatural,—if there is such a thing to be expressed in words.”

“That’s too muddled up to understand,” said she idly, jumping up from her seat, and then standing and looking wickedly down into his grave face, “and I don’t care what it means, and I think ‘John’s’ a very nice man, and I think his wife’s a very nasty woman,—and I’ll tell her so one day.”

“So likely you will!” he said, smiling grimly, “when you’ve time after time confessed, that you are so frightened at the very sight of her, that you instantly escape if

you can, and that all you can do when she is speaking to you is to answer 'yes' or 'no' in the wrong places. You're very flighty and wild this morning, Claire."

"Of course I am, Marc,—you silly! Don't you know why?" exclaimed she, skipping down the room in the exuberance of her spirits.

"No, not exactly," replied he, looking after her and wondering—as if he, himself, were quite elderly—what it must feel like to be as young and lively as that.

"Well,—it's because I'm right, and you're wrong!" cried she, chanting the words melodiously; then, with sudden gravity, she ceased her skipping and trod softly up to him, and, laying her two hands on his shoulders, added earnestly, "Marc, have I not every reason to be happy and light-hearted?—Didn't you say to me that 'you were sure that all the peace and sweetness of our home would be broken up, because Lambert's word could not be depended upon?' And didn't I say to you that I knew he wouldn't take the trouble, either to do you any harm or to bother himself about me just now?"



And it's just a month to-day, — this Saturday, since he came, and—and,—aren't you glad, too, Marc?"

She ended off with a certain pathos in her voice, as if she were tired of waiting for him to show his relief about the matter. But men have so much bigger minds than women, that they like to see a whole, great, finished mercy vouchsafed to them, before they care to show their gratitude. They do not like to say too much—'in case;' they would rather not express what they feel—'because;' they would prefer to wait a little longer and see—'if —.' And, perhaps, they are wise; but the silly women would like them sometimes not to be so judicious or so wise, and to suit their great minds to their smaller minds, and to be grateful for and happy over the little things, as they are.

A month had passed by, and there had been no sign or sight of Lambert. Claire's spirits had gradually risen, as day after day had passed by uneventfully, and all her fears as to how he would come,—when,—and what she would say to him, to show him that she hated him, were as yet unrealized. She knew

that really, she did not expect him to turn up until the appointed three months were over. But her brother had so entirely put on one side this feeling of hers, as being widely improbable, that she had come practically to think his thought about it,—though holding to the undercurrent of her own idea all the time.

She had been dumbfounded, revolted, and, in a way, humiliated, when her brother had told her on that next morning, after Lambert's visit, what the true cause of that visit had been. What it was that had spurred Lambert on to travel the *route* she had taken, when she had left her home; and what it was that had made the interview between him and Lambert, more stormy and antagonistic than it would otherwise have been.

Marcus had put it gently to her,—gently, at least, as he could, at a time when his whole heart was stirred up with indignation and wrath, not only at Lambert's insolence, but at his presumption (as Claire's brother thought it) in even thinking of making Claire his wife. So that, perhaps, he had said more than he had wished to do, or than

he would have, if circumstances had allowed him a little more time for consideration. However it was, the very thought of Lambert and of the hateful meaning of his visit had, for the first few days after, positively sickened Claire. She had never liked her cousin; she had always felt that she would rather him be anywhere except near her, and she thought she had always plainly showed him her repugnance. And in her straightforward, natural way of thinking, she could not understand how he could have any liking for her, when she had so continually showed him her dislike for him. Therefore it could only be that those words that Marcus had uttered so bitterly, as if they were as myrrh and aloes to his lips,—“It is only your money that he wants, it is only your face that he admires,”—were true.

Her money!—She could not altogether take in about this. One of the many pleasures, that breaking off from her home ties and coming to live with Marcus was, in leaving behind all thought of that troublesome appendage—money. Had she not cast in her lot with the disinherited, and thus

become an outcast with him? How, then, could there be thought of her possessing the money, that only *would have been* hers? But her brother explained to her what was his conjecture upon this point. It was this,—that her father, favouring by that strange inconsistency of his, all plans and ideas of Lambert's would, supposing Claire to be willing and humble, have received her back and reinstated her in his favour. And why?—To carry out a purpose. To marry her to his nephew, and thus keep in the family of Islay both money and estate. This was only supposition on her brother's part, but still he thought it not at all an impossible one. And he could see no other reason for Lambert's indolent, yet evident assurance, that all would be well in that respect, were Claire only to acknowledge her mistake and return, then or shortly, to her father's house.

It is undoubtedly a mercy that, in this world, where the ties of sympathy are so close and subtle, a person's individual grievance, sorrow, or wrong cannot, however much he may think it will, entirely engross all his



thoughts and attention. A thoroughly egotistic man (or woman) alone understands more truly how to suffer lengthily for himself, and how comprehensively to lay himself out to be pitied by himself, than anyone else does. It is one of the sweets or bitters,—whichever way it may be regarded,—of egotism. But, to the majority of mankind who feel bound to some one other, or to some many others, by those deep, mysterious bonds which even Death cannot sever, it is impossible to lend all their thoughts and suffer all their feelings, to bear upon what has happened to themselves, only. They have to—aye, and they are glad to, though perhaps they do not recognise it in this light at the time,—turn their ideas and sympathies upon that other or those others, who have been grieved, wronged, or afflicted, as well as they themselves. The feeling for them, thus lessens even the inclination to be overwrought and morose upon the individual grievance. Trials diminish in value, by comparison; and sorrows soften by the knowledge of, and the fellow-feeling for, other sorrows.

Even during those first days, when Claire had had that horrible sickening sensation, caused by the continual thought of Lambert and of his motive in coming, she had found, as often as not, that her thoughts were dwelling also upon her brother's grievance in connection with him. "What would be the state of his feelings?" had been her first thought, when she became aware of her cousin's presence. True, then, she did not know the real object of his visit. She only thought of one of her brother's most cherished hopes, being dashed to the ground. She only passionately saw that one of the deep, sensitive wounds, which had been inflicted upon him as a boy, was about to be reopened and tortured again. And therefore, in the emergency of the moment, and to tide off the evil even for a short while, she had begged and implored Lambert to go, before her brother should see and recognise him. She had had no time to think how this would benefit him,—how this would spare him,—how this would save him from knowing what he must know. All her thoughts had been to drive off the evil just then, and afterwards, if

possible, to have lessened it by preparing him for it.

Her brother's fellow-feeling for her, had taken much the same form and shape. Through those long early hours of morning, when he had sat in his room trying to think out what was best to be done, his thoughts had not alone been occupied by the extent of his own wrong, or by the bitterness of his own trial. Up to the last moment, when the rays of mocking sunlight had shone in upon him, he had fought hard to find, if perchance there might be, any alternative to spare her the pain of hearing what had been her cousin's true motive and reason in coming. But though he had tried to see if there were not some loop-hole, he had found none. He had had to tell her,—there had been no alternative.

In connection with himself, Dr. Sinclair had had strange and seemingly, perhaps, unreasonable ideas.

"I will not,—I cannot stay here," he had said to Claire, in a voice deep with contending emotions. "I tell you, Lambert will come and spread a tale,—perhaps based upon

fact, but so twisted and turned to his own ends, that he will dishonour my name and ruin my reputation. I could not live through this;—I will throw up my practice and leave the place. What else is there for me to do?—All is against me.”

But Claire had begged him to wait,—to consider, even if it were but for a few days. Such a step, such a renunciation of all that he had gained during those past years of hard and incessant study and work,—was not lightly to be thought of. Regret generally follows hard in the course of haste. If he acted upon the spur of the moment, if he did what he would not do in calmer times, if he allowed his indignation and bitterness to get the better of his judgment,—the thought of these causes would prove no balm to him in the after. It would not retrieve the irretrievable, or revoke the irrevocable. Thus, restless, moody, irritable,—he had been for some days uncertain what to do or what not to do. At one time ready to give up everything, at another, wondering at his own folly and wretchedness. Truly,—Claire had had her heart so full of her brother and his diffi-



culties, uncertainties, and considerations that, perforce, the greatness of her own grievance was diminished.

She knew the innate indolence of Lambert's character, far better than her brother did. She had often had the chance of seeing that that "it will not be worth my while" of his, had been the cause of many unworked-out propositions, and unfinished actions. She had noted his inclination to labour for a short, —a very short while, and then as all had not gone smoothly, and there had some trouble and annoyance been entailed, to idly say it was too much labour, and give it up until such time when he might feel inclined for it again.

But, perhaps, it was not so much her knowledge of Lambert's characteristics that made Claire so sure in her own mind, that he would not return until the appointed three months was up, as it was the secret instinct she had within her. This instinct—which they say some women have so strongly—seemed to grow in power and certainty, as time wore on.

"I can't explain to you exactly what I

feel," she had said to her brother, quite seriously, after he had rather repudiated her arguments; "but I am *sure* we are only making ourselves miserable over what isn't going to happen just now. Lambert won't come,—not, at least, for some time; for he wouldn't think of going through another such an exertion, either in the hopes of getting an answer from me or for the pleasure of annoying you. It would be too much trouble just yet for him. Let's try and be as we were before he came."

"Some things are comparatively easy to say, but superlatively difficult to carry out," had been Marcus's sceptical remark in reply. "Perhaps you can do this, Claire, but I cannot. I can't believe and trust to the best as you can—my time and inclination for that is passed—so, fortunately, I am past the age of disappointments."

He scorned himself always after, for betraying to her the bitterness of his spirit. How he vowed each time that he would set a watch upon his tongue and force himself to keep silence, rather than come out with sayings such as these. But though he had a

certain power over himself, though he could shut himself within a case of iron to the outside world, and simply show nothing of what he was feeling,—he found this an impossibility in his sister's presence. He felt himself compelled to tell her something of what was working within him; he longed for her sympathy, and yearned for her to know him as he was. Yet, when at times he laid his heart bare before her, he was ashamed of what lay there. He looked aghast at the lowness and desolation of his own ideas. He bowed his head in despair, when he recognised how great was the difference between the man he had grown into, from the man he had once sought to become. What likeness was there now between them? And what strength or will had he now, to mould himself into other than what he now was?

But Claire was glad whenever her brother lifted the veil of reserve; though, at times, she almost shuddered to see what was disclosed.

"One day, he will tell me everything," she thought, "not only these dark, miserable ideas that he has, but also some of the

beautiful ones. He must have some beautiful ones, only—I suppose, he crushes them all because he thinks them too good to be true. But he couldn't love me as he does if he hadn't them,—and he couldn't be so tender with his patients, and he couldn't like good people like Mrs. Trevor, and he couldn't be so kind to that strange Mr. Humbert, and he couldn't do many things that he does,—if he hadn't many good and beautiful thoughts, as well as all these dark ones. But I wish—I wish I could be more help to him—I wish I knew what to say when he does tell me what he feels—I'm sure Mrs. Trevor would always know what to say,—why can't I be like her? ”

And then, Claire Sinclair would seek an answer to this question and find none: She did not know that between her and the woman she wished to be like,—lay a wide gulf. She did not know that in her own nature lay a possibility which was, to all appearance, not only dormant, but dead. And she did not know yet, that until that possibility was aroused and quickened into life she could never be to her brother—however deep her



love for him—what Mrs. Trevor was to her husband, and to all those who were influenced by her.

There was, however, a note that Sinclair's sister had been able to strike, to which his nature had responded. She had struck it at the time almost unconsciously, amongst many others which had passed unnoticed. It was only a little word, a little suggestion; but it had fruit to bear, and it bore it.

“Marc,” she had said softly, leaning over him, and running her fingers through his dark hair with its many grey streaks, “*are you not too proud* to let this grievance of Lambert bear you down? I remember,—when you were a boy, you used to hold your head so high, and look as if you could be afraid of nothing you would ever do or say, and that nothing should ever cause you to lower it. Are you not as proud now?”

Long after she had said these words, they rang and rang again in his ears.

“Are you not too proud to let this grievance of Lambert's bear you down?”

Where, indeed, was his pride? Where his self-respect, that he should let the thought

of Lambert, and the harm he might do him, haunt, depress, and darken again his whole life? Had he committed any wrong that he should fear? Had his former life contained any wild oats, that threatened to expose him to the world's condemnation?—No, his life had been singularly guarded, singularly pure; there had been nothing in it that had not come within the strictest rules of honour, uprightness, and truth. What, then, was it that was striking him with a cold and clammy hand, whenever he thought of the future? Surely it was something beneath which his pride and self-respect need not to bow. Surely it was the false fear of a revelation, which, if revealed truly, would no whit sully his reputation, or soil the name which he had in honour adopted. Had he not been aggravating his own trial? Had he not been stooping when he might have, and might still—even if the worst came to the worst—stand upright? Had he not been bowing his proud head beneath a fictitious and utterly delusive view, of the powers of Lambert?

This was the fruit of Claire's word. Marcus Sinclair came to regard what had happened,

no longer in an exaggerated and extravagant light, but in the clear light of reason. He was able with a certain amount of calmness to anticipate Lambert's arrival, having come to the conclusion that his first ideas of leaving Abbey'slea, through fear of the harm that he might do him—were unworthy of his consideration. Whatever might happen, whatever evil might lie in his path, he decided that he would face it, not flee from it. And this decision became immediately the means of lifting somewhat, the shadow that had fallen upon him. He was able again to take up the thread of his life, with a lightened heart. Fellow-feeling and sympathy were beginning to work their way.

But—little as Dr. Sinclair thought it—the change parochially that was about to take place in Abbey'slea, was going to affect him far more than anything else. It was going to play a part in the higher development of his nature, beside which, the long longed-for companionship of his sister, sank almost into insignificance. This latter had been one of

the wise and kind orderings of an All-Wise God; but it was granted only as a leading up to, and a preparation for, what was—in a far greater degree—to expand and ennoble this nature of his, wherein lay so much of good that had been bruised and almost crushed.

Yet—at this point in his life—if Dr. Sinclair had been asked whether anything outside his house, and outside his own limited circle of friends—would materially or permanently affect him,—he would have replied with repeated assurance in the negative.

So little do we recognise how the Hand of the Great Weaver, will weave in the woofs and warfs of our lives,—so as best to fulfil His Purpose.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### A STRANGER.

“ARE you coming to Church, Marc?” asked Claire, on the Sunday morning after that Saturday, dating a month from Lambert Islay’s visit.

“No;—what’s the good?” he said moodily.

“Oh, well—you used to come with me when I first came here,” said she, giving him her reason, which might have been a better one. “But I think I have been alone now every Sunday for about nine or ten weeks—and I don’t like going by myself.—Why don’t you come?”

“I hate being a hypocrite,” said he, shortly, getting up and going out of the room.

Claire sighed, but did not attempt to follow him. This matter of going to Church on a Sunday, was one upon which they could not quite agree. *She* thought that, as the custom was to go to a Place of Worship on the

first day of the week, therefore all should go, whether they felt inclined to do so or no. *He* held, that unless good were obtained from going, and unless worship of the Creator was sincere and heartfelt, that it was nothing less than hypocrisy to go. Therefore, he maintained that he,—being not exactly an ‘unbeliever,’ but being far advanced in the stage of indifference,—should be classed amongst those, who would do more good by staying away from Divine Worship, than by attending it. He had accompanied Claire to Church the first several Sundays after her arrival at Abbeyislea, because—he had argued to himself—for her sake, he might for a time put his own scruples on one side. But now that she was no longer quite a stranger, he had—upon some pretext or other—fallen off from what he had first begun. He thought he was no longer called upon to relinquish his own views upon the subject.

—The bells had already begun to peal on the Sunday morning, when these few words were interchanged between them.

“I suppose I must go and get ready,” thought Claire to herself, a few minutes

after her brother's exit from the room ; “ but I *do* wish he'd come with me. I hate that Mrs. Forrester staring at me, and looking with *fresh* surprise every time I come in alone. And then she always seems to catch hold of me after Service to say, ‘ it ought to be my *duty* to bring my irreligious brother with me.’ I wonder now—whether he's more irreligious than I am—or than she is, or—than anyone is.”

How shocked Mrs. Forrester would have been to have heard Claire's looseness of ‘ religious principle !’ And the presumption, too, of classing *her*—Mrs. Forrester's religion—with their own !

“ I wish he'd come,” she said again, half-aloud, as she dawdled irresolutely up the stairs. “ I'll ask him once more,—he sometimes likes being coaxed.”

“ Marc !—Marc ! ” she called invitingly, “ *do* come !—it's Mr. Gambray's last Sunday but one, and then he'll go away and you'll never see him again perhaps ;—and it's such a lovely day,—and I'm rather late,—and the bells will have stopped before I get there,—and I can't walk in by myself and get hot,

because everyone will turn round and stare —and—and —”

“Any more reasons, Claire?” he called back good-humouredly, from his study.

“Yes, a lot more, but no time to catalogue them,” she replied, laughing; “but I’ll tell you them on our way, and occupy all your time there and back with reasons if you will come!

“But I have far better reasons for staying away, than you have for going,” he remarked, rather gruffly—not to her, for she was already at the top of the stairs and half-way in her room, trying to make up for lost time.

“I believe he’s thinking of coming,” she said to herself, feeling particularly happy at the thought. “I am awfully proud when I’m walking in with him, he’s so tall and so fine-looking. If I were a girl I’d fall in love with him directly.”

She meant “if she weren’t his sister;” but she hurried over the expression of her thoughts at times so much, that they were apt to get a little mixed.

Of course, she stood before the looking-glass a minute or so before she went down,—



as all girls do, whether they have plain or pretty faces. But they don't always do it from a sense of vanity; only from a wish to see if they are looking as well as they can look. And this, perforce, arises only from self-respect, nothing baser.

It was certainly a very pretty face that Claire saw reflected in the glass,—prettier far than it was when she had first come to her brother's. The soft, dark cheek was rounder and more richly coloured. The great brown eyes—so wistful and almost sad before—were brighter and more beautiful, with still that steady, earnest look about them. And the sweet lips, that had had that unhappy droop in their corners, were oftener parted now in laughter; and so, when in repose, the slight hang-down that had somewhat marred their beauty, seemed almost to have disappeared. For,—notwithstanding the ill-timed and ill-fated visit of Lambert's,—notwithstanding the anticipation of his return and of his reason for returning,—notwithstanding the little glimpses into her own and Marcus's lives, which showed that even the most golden thoughts and wishes are not

all quite golden when they are realized,—still, Claire was very happy. Happier, she thought, than she had ever been before; happier than when she had been a child and had had Marc to herself during his holidays, because then there had always been the knowledge that in a few weeks would come the parting again. But now they had a home together, and there need be no reckoning of time.

No wonder then, that Claire Sinclair's face was prettier than Claire Islay's had been. As a great writer once said,—“The key to a woman's whole being is to be found in her unfettered affections. The moment she loses her individuality, in her earnest, engrossing and self-sacrificing devotion to another, the hidden springs of feeling are unsealed, and energies and capabilities of which she was before unconscious, become revealed.” Some of Claire's deepest and most inspiring feelings had been fettered before, thus,—her beauty had lacked the crowning grace of beauty; but now, she was free to love and be beloved, and in the sweetness of her freedom, her beauty grew.

She smiled at her own face in the glass,—

not because she was so satisfied with it, but because she meant to go down that very moment to Marc, and smile the same smile, and see if she couldn't persuade him to come with her.

But,—before she reached the bottom of the stairs, treading demurely with a certain Sunday, churchy tread,—she found that she shouldn't need that sweet smile of hers, to draw him with her to the Church. For, to her surprise, she found him waiting, hat in hand, for her.

“I'm coming,” he said shortly, giving no reason, and looking as if he would rather she shouldn't ask him why he had changed his mind.

And so, Claire,—who watched each expression of his face, and knew what every slightest one implied,—tried not to look too surprised or too glad; but only to take it as a matter of course, that he was going to accompany her.

The way to the Church lay along the level road for a short quarter of a mile, then—branching off from this high road was another road much narrower,—a lane it might

be called,—not running flat along, but with a steep and curved incline. It was round the curving of this steep incline, that Mr. Gambray had watched with loving eye his daughter, Eva ; she, escaping from the hands of his fair parishioner,—Mrs. Forrester,—and he, just within her grasp.

Many people—especially those who were apt to start from their homes just a few minutes too late to arrive punctually at the Church,—blamed their forefathers of some centuries ago, for having built their Place of Worship on a hill. But those others,—who always could manage to be in time, and thus could afford to be severe upon the ‘few minutes-too-late ones,’—changed just one word of a scriptural phrase and said, “A *Church* that is set on a hill cannot be hid ;”—and so they maintained, this Church of Abbeyslea was surely in its right position.

The Church itself,—with its ancient grey-stoned walls,—was a quaint and curious building. Its tower was square and low, with thick trailing ivy, not only clinging to it, but seeming—in its weight and massiveness—to be grasping it, holding up its little height, and



giving it a breadth and bigness, that was not distinctly all its own. The architecture of the body of the church, could neither boast of purely Norman or early English origin; it seemed to have passed through many stages, —each fine and noble in itself, but, when compared, marred by lack of symmetry.

Still, the people of Abbeyslea and even all inhabitants of the large town of O—, and many of the towns and villages around, were proud of their ancient “Abbey,” as they sometimes loved to call it.

Exquisite care and tender precaution, had been used in restoring it. There had been no ruthless defacings of the delicate carvings; there had been no rough handlings of those old and crumbled parts, which had needed only adding to and strengthening; there had been no desecrating removals of those ancient tombs and monuments, which stood within the nave and chancel of the Church, marking spots where the remains of great and honoured men had once been lowered. The architect, to whom the restoration of this ancient House of God had been committed, must have had a soul within him.

that had a love for all that is old and quaint and time-worn; and an eye, not only capable of seeing, but of discerning,—which makes a difference, when things beneath its notice need delicacy of touch and tenderness of handling.

Contrary to Claire's expectations, the bells still continued ringing as she and her brother, having turned the sharp curve of that winding lane, came to the sloping Church yard, which was bound in by a low and moss-grown wall.

"I thought we should have been late," said she, perhaps a little disappointed that they were not, as she had Marc to walk in with.

"So,—one of your reasons has fallen through," remarked her brother drily; "what a hypocrite I am, to have come with you; and what a bad little sister you are to have even wished me to come!"

"I don't see that," said she, lowering her voice, for they were within a few feet of the porch, and several of the 'regular' congregation were hurrying in.

"Don't you?" said he cynically, not

heeding who was near, "well, I do then. I see that, in entering this Building, I am acting a double part,—I am appearing what I'm not,—in fact, I'm as good as coming here to—mock God. That's plain speaking, but—it's true."

"Hush!" whispered Claire.

But, her warning came too late. Her brother's words, or, at least some of them, had been overheard.

Standing just outside the porch, intent upon examining its curious, deep sculpturing, was a man of rather below the medium height. His back had been towards them, as they had advanced up the narrow path,—bordered only by its high, uneven tombstones,—which led to the old oak door. But,—as Dr. Sinclair's deep voice ceased,—this man turned suddenly, and looked full at him,—*not* in astonishment, aghast at the words that he must certainly have heard, but with a certain curious and unfeigned admiration.

"This must be a stranger," thought Claire, glancing timidly at him, while he was still gazing at her brother. "How fortunate! I shouldn't have liked any of the people we

know, to have heard Marc's words, just then."

At that moment the bells stopped, and there came from within the sound of the organ. At the sound, the stranger half started, as if recollecting himself; then, with a hasty gesture, he uncovered his head, and disappeared through the heavy oaken doorway.

Dr. Sinclair looked after him, with a light gleaming in his dark, melancholy eyes.

"That man's a man," muttered he, half to himself.

"I think he looks like a monk," whispered Claire, "and,—I believe he is one, too."

*Nominally*,—all the seats in Abbeyslea church, were free; and rags and tatters could sit by velvets and satins. *Nominally*,—there were no pews set apart for the poor and the despised, because every seat was open to all; the miserable sinners might bow the knee by the side of the respectable sinners. *Nominally*,—the Pharisee and the Publican could overhear each other's confessions, for *nominally*, in this house of God, differences and class distinctions,—the world's



contrivances—were set aside. But, all this was *only nominal*. The vast majority of Christians find it impossible to think and be different, during the hour and a half that they spend in the Church once a week, to what they are during the lifetime they spend out of it. Perhaps it is too much to expect that they should, even !

Thus, it had come to be an acknowledged thing that seats, though unpaid for, were appropriated and regarded in the light of both right and possession. The families of best position, birth, and most rich in this world's goods, selected, or had selected for them by the Rector, the seats in the central aisles, where a good view of the clergyman, the choir and the pulpit, was assured. The side aisles might be occupied by those who possessed but medium standing in the social circles, or by those trades, or poor people who chose to take a country walk from the city of O—, to worship God in a country church. And this was a very fair and proper arrangement, regarding it in a certain light, and taking it for granted that the people, who entered the house of God, kept

within the limits of even *nominal Christians*. But, sometimes, they even forgot that they laid claim to this!

Dr. Sinclair had had selected for his sister, previous to her coming, and sometimes for himself, two seats in a pew about half-way up the central aisle, on the left aisle side. He did not want, either for himself or Claire, to occupy a conspicuous position.

Two pews above theirs were Mr. and Mrs. Forrester's seats, on the central aisle side. The fine old oak pews in Abbeyslea Church were wide, seating with ease and comfort, quite six persons of ordinary size. But, Mrs. Forrester liked to regard the pew she occupied, as *her* pew. She liked to have room to seat her visitors, whenever she had any staying with her, in the same pew. When she had none, a very high-bred widow lady occupied the corner seat, opening into the side aisle,—thus, at the opposite end of the pew to Mrs. Forrester. If the Church were very full, some other high-bred lady or gentleman of Mrs. Forrester's acquaintance, might venture into the large, empty space, between Mrs. Forrester and the widow lady,—but, not otherwise.

As Claire entered with her brother, and, as quickly as possible, made her way to their seat, she caught sight of the dark, monk's-looking head of the stranger who had just preceded them. He was in an end seat of the side aisle seats, close on a line with theirs. His head was bowed low in prayer, and his face was completely buried in his hands. She could not help noticing that they were beautiful hands,—nervous, blue-veined, feeling,—with long, shapely fingers, trembling slightly over the face they hid.

“I wonder whether he'll look at Marc like that again,” thought Claire, as her brother, holding back to allow her to pass first into their seat, almost touched the kneeling stranger with his coat; for the aisles were narrow, and one of the low, massive, Norman pillars rose just there, and narrowed it still more.

Just as Claire passed into her seat, she caught Mrs. Forrester's vigilant, back-looking eye. The eye expressed approbation at her irreligious brother's presence; but, almost in the same glance, reproof, for being ‘not just in time.’

Eyes are such wonderfully expressive monitors,—especially in church!

The high-bred widow lady was not present. Perhaps she was away, or perhaps in ill-health. Mrs. Forrester had laid her sunshade and her husband's hat, along her unoccupied pew. She didn't want any late comers, or any set of people she didn't know,—to come and disturb her devotions. Besides, John was so big and clumsy,—he must have plenty of room.

John was a good, straightforward, Christian man. When he came to Church, he came with the purpose of joining in the Service, of praying to and praising his God. He came to get strength to lead aright, the not-altogether easy home-life he had to lead. He came to ask pardon for the times he failed, and the mistakes he made. He loved the Service,—every part of it, and joined heartily in it; too heartily, with not enough refinement and choice of intonation, his wife thought, and repeatedly told him. But, though he loved her and did all he could to please her, he could not change in this. He was not aware of the outward effect of his worship, so he did not know how to alter what was as nothing to him. He never



knew who was in Church, or who was not; except sometimes, when a little child came shyly up to some pew above theirs, and then he couldn't help smiling at it. Perhaps, also, then would arise the not-included-in-the-Prayer-Book-prayers,—a petition for a baby hand and heart to be pressed to his great heart, that he might call and know to be his own. For, John Forrester had laid this secret, great desire before his Maker; waiting patiently, if yet it might be granted him.

Ah!—if his great love for his wife had not made him so blind, he would have known how, instead, to thank God for His merciful denial.

It was not until the organ voluntary had died away, and the measured, rather drowsy voice of Mr. Gambray had opened the Service by exhorting his brethren “to confess their sins,”—that the stranger in the side-aisle rose from his knees. He gave a quick glance up at the chancel,—saw the white-robed choir of boys and men, saw the Rector's fine, docile face, saw the surrounding congregation of well-dressed and appar-

ently good and cultivated people, and saw the man who had made the open confession before he had entered the Church, that his coming there was simply making a mock of God.

This was what Dr. Sinclair thought, as he watched that one short, rapid glance given by the stranger, before the eyes were dropped upon his open Prayer Book. But Dr. Sinclair himself,—as he had not come to worship God,—let his eyes still rest on the face of the man, who had overheard his words. He watched it all through the Exhortation, the Confession, the Absolution; and then, as the congregation knelt and joined in the “Lord’s Prayer,” he said again, what he had said before,—though this time low down, and only to himself —

“That man’s a man.”

The stranger’s face was a striking one. It was a thin, pale face, clean shaven, and strongly marked with lines, not wrinkles. The eyes—quick, far-seeing, long eyes,—were not particularly deep set or large, but were strangely kindling under their straight, coal-black brows. Beneath them were lines,—

horizontal lines; the cheeks were too thin and straight for hollows. Above the coal-black brows was a low, yet wide, forehead; it looked as if it should have been higher, as if Nature had made rather a mistake about it. But, if she had not done ample justice to the forehead, she had meted out full measure to the mouth. The stranger's mouth was beautiful; exquisitely cut, wide,—but so curved, so tender, so full of delicate expression, that every bit of its width was needed. Round the mouth and up the sides of the face, was that blue look that very dark men have when closely shaven. The head was rather small and narrow, with black hair growing thickly at the back, but more sparing in the front, and thinner still upon the top. This rather strange growth of the hair, had made Claire think he was a monk; perhaps he was one,—but Dr. Sinclair thought not.

He had a clerical coat on, long, rough, and rather worn. His figure was spare, more lithe than strong, more that of an *Æsthete* than of an *Epicure*. It was too thin, and the shoulders were not square or broad.

enough to make it a good figure. But the 'whole man' lay in the power and expression of his face, which—even in repose—had a strange, fascinating strength about it. It seemed to be the face of a good man,—highly-susceptive, strong-willed, intellectual; but, withal,—tender, gentle, capable of loving.

Dr. Sinclair did not see all this in that first long gaze of his. He only saw then, that there lay in this stranger's face something that attracted and electrified him, and made him not sorry, but glad that he had overheard those words of his outside the Church porch. He would have wished to have looked even longer, and to have met his eyes again, but a feeling of courtesy made him refrain from again regarding him. So he looked away as they rose from their knees, or from their lounging stoops,—in which position many of the worshippers had been lazily and contentedly confessing their sins, and receiving absolution from them.

As they rose, there was the sound at the door of the Church of some late-comers entering. They may have been waiting outside until the congregation moved, and



become, perhaps, impatient at the length of the prayers they were not themselves joining in. However it was, they seemed to hasten up the first aisle that they saw, anxious to get into seats as quickly and unnoticeably as possible. They were not parishioners, but the seats in Abbeyslea Church were known to be free, and so they might enter any pews where were vacant seats.

From the sound of shuffling feet, several of them must have slipped into seats behind where the Sinclairs sat, but there remained still three, who,—seeing that long pew with only a lady and gentleman in the further end of it, just a little above the central pillar,—passed the Sinclairs and prepared to enter it.

Claire looked at her brother, to see if he were looking. Everyone knew Mrs. Forrester's feeling about *her* pew; and everyone knew, as they saw the distinctly shoppy look of the three late comers, that—upon some pretext or other—Mrs. Forrester would prevent their entering what she considered,—her own personal property and possession.

Her vigilant eye had caught sight of the three smartly-dressed young women, who

had ventured further up than those other people, who had come in at the same time as they. She seemed to have a presentiment that they were going to presume to enter her pew, for with almost imperceptible movement, and whilst repeating devoutly

“The Lord’s name be praised,”

she sidled half-way down the pew, slipping her husband’s hat and her sunshade further along the empty seat as she did so, till the point of the latter touched the unoccupied end of it.

At this juncture, one of the smart young women, entirely unconscious of the preparations of defence, and of the rebuff she was going to meet with, made one step into the pew, at the same time signing to her companions that there was ample room for all of them.

But no second step was taken. Mrs. Forrester, with a dignified look of calm truth, leant forward, and said in a nearly-audible whisper,—pointing to the end seat as she did so —

“That seat is taken.”

All three young women looked askance at the seat. They could *not* see that it *was* occupied. They could not guess at Mrs. Forrester’s playing at truth, in meaning that

that particular corner seat *was* reserved, occupied and taken,—*as a rule*. So they did not move, but looked from the seats—upon which were outlaid the hat and sunshade—to Mrs. Forrester, and simply waited for her to move back to her position near the gentleman, and leave room for them all to enter.

But Mrs. Forrester meditated doing nothing of the kind.

“That seat is taken,” she repeated, in tones no longer lowered, drawing herself up, and regarding the would-be intruders, as if they were as so much dirt beneath her feet,—“and there is no room further in.”

Scarcely were the words out of her mouth, when the slight figure of the stranger, with the dark, monk’s-looking head, was seen to dart from his seat in the side aisle, and reaching from behind the young woman who had still one foot in Mrs. Forrester’s pew, he caught up the sunshade and hat, and said in a voice that could be distinctly heard all over the Building —

“*This House is the House of God, but YOU are making it a den of thieves.*”

And, as he spoke, he bent his kindling eye upon—Mrs. Forrester.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### AT BAY.

“ A MOST disgraceful thing!—It ought not to be allowed!—Policemen in plain clothes should be stationed about!—It was *my* pew, and I had a right to choose who should come into it, and who should not. Where is that man,—that common man who took up my sunshade, and made those people sit in my seat, and caused such a commotion in the service?—I say it’s a *disgraceful thing*, that a lady of my position can’t go into Church, and do what’s right and proper, without being interfered with, and having blasphemous language,—blasphemous, I say, used and — ”

But Mrs. Forrester could get no further. Her indignation was too great. Words even failed her to express what she felt. Terms were too mild to convey any idea, of the wrong that had been done. The whole range of language was inadequate to express



the blow her dignity had received, and the storm of Christian feelings that had been aroused.

The service had ended; Mr. Gambray's last sermon, but one, had been preached; the Blessing of Peace had been passed upon the kneeling congregation,—and then, there had been a hurried retreat into the Church-yard.

Most of the people had been longing for the service to end. Most of them had been occupied by thoughts, far removed from the topic of Mr. Gambray's sermon. Most of them had felt in a hurry, during the delivery of that final Blessing of Peace,—thinking of the lively expressions of war and ill-feeling which would, a minute or two later, be circulating in the outer court of the Sacred Precincts.

Though the whole congregation had not witnessed the little Christian scene, between Mrs. Forrester and those three late-comers who had wished to enter her pew,—the whole Church had heard the stern denouncement of her doings. And, more than this. The whole Church seemed to know that she had

been worsted. That, after those few, brief, telling words, Mrs. Forrester had retreated back to her place near to her husband—nearer than usual,—and had left those four vacant seats in her pew unguarded. And those seats were occupied during the whole Service, by those three smartly-dressed young women, whom she had snubbed and tried to drive out, because they were shoppy-looking, and not the kind of people she liked to have sitting next to her.

This was the climax of humiliation,—she had been *worsted*. Beneath the stern, unflinching gaze of that spare, stranger man, Mrs. Forrester's eyes had sunk. Against her will, she had moved back to her end of the pew. During the whole of the remaining part of the Service, she had not been her usual self: she had felt cowed, restrained, beaten. She had chafed against this uncustomary sensation, and had tried to rise above it. But it was of no avail. Until she rose to leave the Church, Mrs. Forrester was unable to regain the dignity, assurance, and command of herself, that were her usual appendages.

But, by the time she had reached the outer porch, and had many of the congregation pressing around her,—Mrs. Forrester's self had returned to her. Mrs. Forrester's self with less of a veil thrown over it, than on most occasions. For, Mrs. Forrester's self had been crushed and almost paralyzed for a while, and was both injudicious and ungovernable, when its power returned to it.

“Where is that man,—that rude, interfering man?”—she said, moving further out into the Churchyard, and not deigning to notice the many exclamations of surprise, condolence, and sympathetic indignation, that rose around her,—“he used *blasphemous* language,—he must be a *heathen*, or a *methodist*, or *something dreadful*. He oughtn't to be allowed in *any* church,—he ought to be *black-balled* and *thrust out*. He was only a *common* man, I believe, too,—and, using those words to me,—to me, a lady, and he—a *common*—”

“Yes, a common man,—and you, Madam, are a common woman. We are all common men and women, and in that light, we worship *one Father common to all*.”

The words were spoken very quietly, but it was by the same voice that had said —

“This House is the House of God, but *you* are making it a den of thieves.”

For the stranger man, with the worn, long coat, was standing amongst others of the congregation not far from Mrs. Forrester.

All eyes were turned upon him to see what manner of common man this was, that was daring to address a lady like this; to see, also, what kind of common man this was, with so distinct and refined an utterance, and with so musical and modulating a voice.

Mrs. Forrester's face paled, as she, also, turned slightly round; for the voice had seemed to have come slightly to one side of her. She had not thought this man could be anywhere near, or she would have chosen her words and epithets more nicely. He might be a gentleman after all, and not a common man. She didn't know in the least who he was, only,—she had never been accustomed to any gentleman speaking in the way he had to her, and, therefore, she had concluded that he couldn't belong to that class. But, whatever he belonged to, or,



whoever he was,—Mrs. Forrester was determined, notwithstanding the qualm of fear she felt within her, and the unusual quickening of her pulses,—to show him what *she* thought of the words he was addressing to her now, and of those he had pointed at her in the Church.

But the stranger also had a mission to perform, before which Mrs. Forrester's would have to give way.

He was standing, with his low, clerical hat pressed rather down on his forehead, giving that peculiar look of the eyes gleaming straight from beneath it. They were fixed upon Mrs. Forrester,—not angrily, not fiercely, but with a certain burning power, as if he were compelling her to look at him,—compelling her to acknowledge that, before God, she was but a common woman, as he was but a common man. His mouth, slightly compressed, straightened the curves in it, and thus hid, somewhat, its natural tenderness and mobility.

The moment his eye caught Mrs. Forrester's, he made a movement towards her; and, as if understanding the intention

of his will,—the ladies and gentlemen who were standing between her and him, without a word or gesture, parted before him.

“Madam,” he said, standing a few feet from her, lifting his hat and baring his head as he spoke, with a courtesy that is not usual to those common men, amongst whom Mrs. Forrester had classed him, “before God, I have a word to speak to you. That House which you have just left is a Place set apart, consecrated, and sacred to the worship of God. In it, men and women, high and low, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, well-dressed and ill-dressed,—are as *one* before God. There is no difference between you and what you call the lowest of creatures, save only, that if that lowest one has a heart near to God, he is far higher and far nearer the Kingdom of God, than you are. For your heart, Madam, is *not* right before God; otherwise, you would neither have told a lie in His House, nor have refused to see kneeling at your side three of His people. What right had you to rob God? What right had you to take what was not yours? What right had you to deny the whole principles of

Christ's religion, and to make as a mockery the bond of brotherhood, in which every man and woman, bearing His name, is knit?—Better for you to keep from public worship;—better for you to avow openly your disbelief in what you profess;—better for you, even, not to have known of Him, whose name is Love,—than to have *this* condemnation pass forth against you:—‘*Woe unto you, hypocrite, —ye shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men;—ye neither go in yourself, neither suffer ye them that are entering, to go in.*’”

For a moment after these last strong words had sounded forth, there was a profound silence. Some of the people around, looked with shocked wonder and pious indignation at this bold and blasphemous stranger; others gazed mutely at him, in open admiration. Not an eye was turned upon Mrs. Forrester; not a word was upraised to defend her. Good and bad, righteous and unrighteous, Pharisee and Publican, *knew*, in the bottom of their hearts, that the words which this stranger had boldly spoken, were fair,—right,—true—words, and that in the sight of God, he had done his duty in speaking them.

What is this House of God,—that men do make it “a den of thieves?” What is this Place of Worship, in which the rich turn to the poor, and—as good as, say, “Come not near unto us, we are holier than you, we are more privileged creatures than you, we have money and position, and can take unto us the upper seats,—while you may sit in the lower, amongst those like unto yourselves. We are fastidious;—we care not to soil our fine garments with your poor ones;—we care not to hear your ill-pronounced jargon with our refined enunciation;—we care not to be seen of our neighbours to be sitting next to such as you. We are more righteous,—we are more acceptable,—we are more learned in doctrine and dogma. Therefore,—sit ye apart from us; we will take the best, you shall take the worst; we will be comfortable, you shall sit where you can,—only, come not near us,—disturb not our devotions,—mingle not your miserable “God, be merciful” with our contented “We thank God we are not as other men are.”—Worship God as you will, or, don’t worship Him at all, it won’t matter to us, only—*only*, spare our refined senses,



—spare our cultivated tastes,—spare our love of class distinctions, and—come not near us !”

Is there a God of the rich and a God of the poor? Is there a God who says—“Ye are all members one of another,”—and a God who would separate in His own House even, the outwardly rich from the outwardly poor? Is there a God who says—“Love the brotherhood,”—and a God who would have you gather up your skirts, lest even the hems thereof shall be soiled in the contact with those, whose bodies are clothed with stuffs of coarser fibre than your own? Is there a God who has declared—“All souls are mine,”—and a God who holds that the souls of the rich, are more precious and more privileged than those of the poor? Is there a God Who gives forth His word, and a God Who never intended that word to be kept? Is there a God who says—“Do this,”—and a God who says to the same thing—“Do it not.” *Or*—is it that men, though acknowledging and nominally serving the one High God, yet take unto them another god—even the god of their own will; to let him interpret the words of their Creator

as it seemeth most pleasant and most easy, and most according to their own pampered tastes?

The House of God should be *as* "the Gate of Heaven." There, we think, there will alone be the division between—good and bad. The worldly distinctions will not exist; they will have been swept away amongst all other earthly things—perishable. Yet, there comes a time even now, when in the public worship held in the House of God—men and women stand before their Creator as they will stand then, and not as they to their fellow creatures do now appear. Is it therefore a thing incredible that, for a while, the veil that covers them now, should be regarded only as a veil? That the things outward should be as nothing before the things inward? That,—not only in the sight of God, but in the sight of all men—a rich man should stretch forth his hand to a poor one and say, "Hand to hand, and heart to heart?" That a rich woman should tenderly draw in the poor one and make room for her by her side, telling her of the law of Love which makes all things common between them? Is it im-

possible that this should be *even* in the House of God?—*even* at the Gate of Heaven? If so, —there must be a flaw in the religion we hold, and a stumbling block in it, over which many will stumble and fall. *But*,—the flaw and the stumbling block must be of man's own making,——they *cannot* be of God's.

The stranger man's face was white and quivering, as silently he turned from the gaze of those many eyes, that were upon him. For one moment he looked back at the beautiful old Parish Church, with its low square tower and clinging ivy, and as he did so, the sternness on his mouth vanished, and instead, a smile—exquisitely soft and tender—played upon his parting lips, and crept into his dark, kindling eyes.

“The Love and Long suffering of the Father passeth understanding,” he murmured, half to himself; but some of those who stood close by him, heard the words, and remembered them, and the strange sweetness of the smile that lit his face, long afterwards. Then, with a slight bow, and covering again his bare head,—he passed rapidly through the midst of the people, down the sloping Church-

yard, down near the little moss-grown wall, where the entrance covered gateway lay.

And the people stood and looked silently after him, and watched him disappear round the turning of that steep and winding lane, which led downward from Abbeyslea's old Church.

He slackened his speed somewhat, as he felt himself once more alone ; once more distant from the stare and wonder of his fellow human beings. Strange it is, how people *do* stare and wonder, when one amongst them is man enough to stand forward and do a duty, which is not an easy or a pleasant one !

“ I feel as if I should like to turn into a field, like the common man that I am, and lie down in the ditch and have a good rest ; ” said the stranger aloud, as no one was within hearing and he was in the habit of talking to himself. For, he felt weary ; every limb seemed aching as if he had walked miles, and had thoroughly overdone himself. He had not really walked far that day, and he had felt perfectly fresh and strong before the Service he had attended had begun.

By the wayside hedge he saw one of those



few wild flowers that bloom so late in the summer, and, looking at it, he thought how beautiful and fair it was. So, he plucked it gently, delicately, as, with a woman's hand, and laid it in the buttonhole of his coat.

“It's company to me,” he explained to himself, thinking not, how incongruous the pretty flower looked in his worn coat, and with his white, weary face above it. For, though this man had but just stood forth in the name of his Master, and boldly rebuked one of the well-to-do and ne'er-to-be-interfered-with rich ones of the world,—though he had done a duty, in which he had been divinely lent both power and wisdom,—yet, when the deed was over, when the strength was no longer needed,—the not unusual reaction set in. The stranger, whose God was so near to him, yet felt himself just then—alone, estranged from his fellow-men. So solitary, that he plucked a wayside flower to bear him company ; so weary, that he would fain have lain himself down in a field to rest.

After he had reached the bottom of the hilly lane that led into the high road,—he paused in his onward course and looked first

along the straight, white road, and then to the left of him, across some flat-lying fields, which seemed to stretch right in the direction of the city of O—. A high, awkward stile was the means of access to these fields; along which could be seen a faint, white-worn footpath.

“I wonder whether that will lead me more directly to the little inn where I am lodging,” said the stranger again aloud, perplexed as to which way he should take,—“I feel half inclined to try it,—so much pleasanter as it would be, than along that great white road, with so few trees and so many houses. Let me see —”

He looked down at his flower, and a happy thought struck him.

“Little flower, which shall I do?” said he, standing facing the high road, and smiling as he did so,—“you shall be my guide. Whichever way your head turns, I will go; only it must look either straight in front, or else to the left;—the other directions are strictly prohibited.”

Then, bending his head quite close to his flower, he saw that, on its tender stem, it

leant a little to the left, where the awkward stile arose. It did not seem to like the look of the dusty road, and had turned its head away.

“ Ah ! ” said the stranger, almost with alacrity, stepping briskly forward to the stile, “ it has pointed out the way I wished to go. Sweet flower !—Pretty little companion ! ”

What would the cultivated, intellectual people of Abbeyslea have said, if they had heard this stranger talking thus simple—almost like a child—to a wayside flower, that he had plucked ? What would they have thought if they had come upon him unawares, and found him wishing that he could go into a field as a tramp, and lie down in a ditch to rest ? What would have been their glance of incredulous wonder, if—looking at his clerical hat and coat—they had heard him talk of the little *inn* where he was lodging ? And what would have been the opinion they would have given, if, at the same time, they had recalled the strong, authoritative words he had spoken but a while ago,—which had held them all as in a charm,—silent—rebuked—immovable ?

But, perhaps, the ideas about him and his strange, contradictory ways,—had better not be premised. Or, perhaps, it would be as well, to follow him yet a little further, to see whither his way led him.

It was the hottest part of the day,—a day towards the end of a July, that had been hot and rainless all the way through. The sun shone down, bright and fierce, upon the shorn grass, where the hay had all been cut and gathered in. The first field, through which the stranger passed, was thus clipt, and looked rather brown by the steady, shadeless heat of the burning sun. But the second field, along which the little white-worn path still lay, was one, waving fair and beautiful, with bright green corn; not yellowed yet with maturing ripeness, but still fresh, and young and very green,—as if the sun had no power to turn and golden it before its proper time.

“How refreshing!—it does not even *look* hot!” said the stranger, lifting his hat from the brow, which was moist with heat and fatigue. “I sometimes think it would be nice to lose oneself so entirely in something



different to oneself, as to be unconscious of oneself, — unconscious, physically and mentally. What would it not be, to be for a minute or so,—as a blade of corn, growing amongst other corn ? ”

He paused a moment, thinking ; then, seeing that the field was wide and long, and that the city of O— still looked quite a distance off, he hastened on faster than before, thinking half-aloud as he went along.

“ At least, to be a blade of corn would take away one’s individual consciousness !— At least, it would give a closer fellowship !— At least, were I but a blade of corn, I should have other blades so close to me that never, never could I be—as it were—*alone*. O God ! O Father !—how lonely I am,—how separate,—how solitary ! Overshadow me, O Father,—overshadow me, lest I die of weariness of being alone ! ”

At the end of the field of bright green blades, stood a gate,—unfastened and slightly ajar. It led into a very narrow lane, with a high hedge on either side overshadowing the pathway that lay between, and keeping the air quite cool and damp-feeling, shut off from

all the heat of the burning sun. A slight breeze seemed to flutter through the hedge leaves,—a breeze that had been unheard and unfelt before, but now, in the stillness of the shadowed lane, it was just enough to stir the little leaves, and to faintly fan the stranger's hot and aching brow. It revived him, and he lifted up his face with a smile and a light in his clouded eye, to thank the God Who, in his loneliness, had made him feel how close was the shadowing of His Care and Love.

The little lane was long and straight; but, at length, it opened out into a field of fragrant clover, where the many-coloured butterflies were revelling in its fragrance, and the small field bees were humming and byrrhing and sucking sweetness from the pink and crimson heads. It was a sight so beautiful, so rich in colour, so busy with motion,—that the stranger stood a moment to look at it.

“How happy it all seems,” said he, following the pathway that was cut right across the field, without looking where it led to. But, when he had traversed it right to its further end,—he saw that, if he had wished to

bear on straight in the direction of the city, he should have kept along close by the hedge, which, he could see now, would have taken him, after a while, into a road leading him to his destination. But the field was wide and covered many acres of land, and, being unsheltered, the stranger was hot again and very thirsty. He looked on, wondering if he *must* turn back all that way again, and retrace his steps. Was there no cottage near, where he could ask a glass of water to cool his parched tongue,—and, beneath whose roof, he might rest awhile, until the heat of the mid-day sun had lost something of its fierce power ?

Abbeyslea Parish had no cottages ; but he must be on the western borders of the Parish now, not far from where the next-lying, not-so-prosperous suburb lay.

Glancing around, he saw that his pathway took him straight to the angle of a hedge ; and, in this hedge was a large and passable gap. He could see on looking through this gap, that there lay on the other side of it, a field of stubble. The hedge dividing the field of clover from the field of stubble was

very high ; and here and there along it grew great overspreading elms, and the thick, short trunks of shorn willow trees.

The stranger hastened on to the gap. The hedge was too high and thick, and the blockade of trees too impenetrable for him to see through, from a distance, whether what lay beyond was all a field of stubble.

He gained the gap ; and, as he caught hold of a firm, fence stick to help himself up,—a white fowl, surrounded by a brood of milk-white chickens, chuckled and fluttered and bustled away, cackling at the intrusion.

And just beyond lay a little hen house, round which were gathered other fowls ; and close to that, again, stood a wicket gate which led into a garden, in the midst of which, standing right beneath that high hedge and an overshadowing elm, rose a low thatched cottage.

The door, overhung by sweet-scented honeysuckle and blushing monthly roses, was half-opened. And, as the stranger reached the wicket gate, he could look inside to the little low-roofed room ; and there he saw, seated at their Sunday dinner,—a working



man in his Sunday clothes, and his neat-haired wife, and two bonny bairns.

“ My friends, I am hot and thirsty,—might I beg a glass of water ? ” asked the stranger, stooping somewhat beneath the trailing honeysuckle, and bringing his face in close to the door that stood ajar.

“ An’ welcome, sir,—mighty hot an’ it be,” replied the man heartily, rising as he spoke, and looking at the spare figure standing half within his threshold.

Something upon the tired face of the stranger, must have attracted him ; for, on the spur of the moment, he further added, what he would not, otherwise, have made so bold as to say —

“ An’ you be not too proud, sir, you’d just step in and sit down along a’ us. You looks a bit done and squeamish, an’ I reckon the sun ha’ been a’ his work a’ you. But,—ye be a gent, I knaws,—and we be but puir, common folk. You be too proud,—an’ sure ? ”

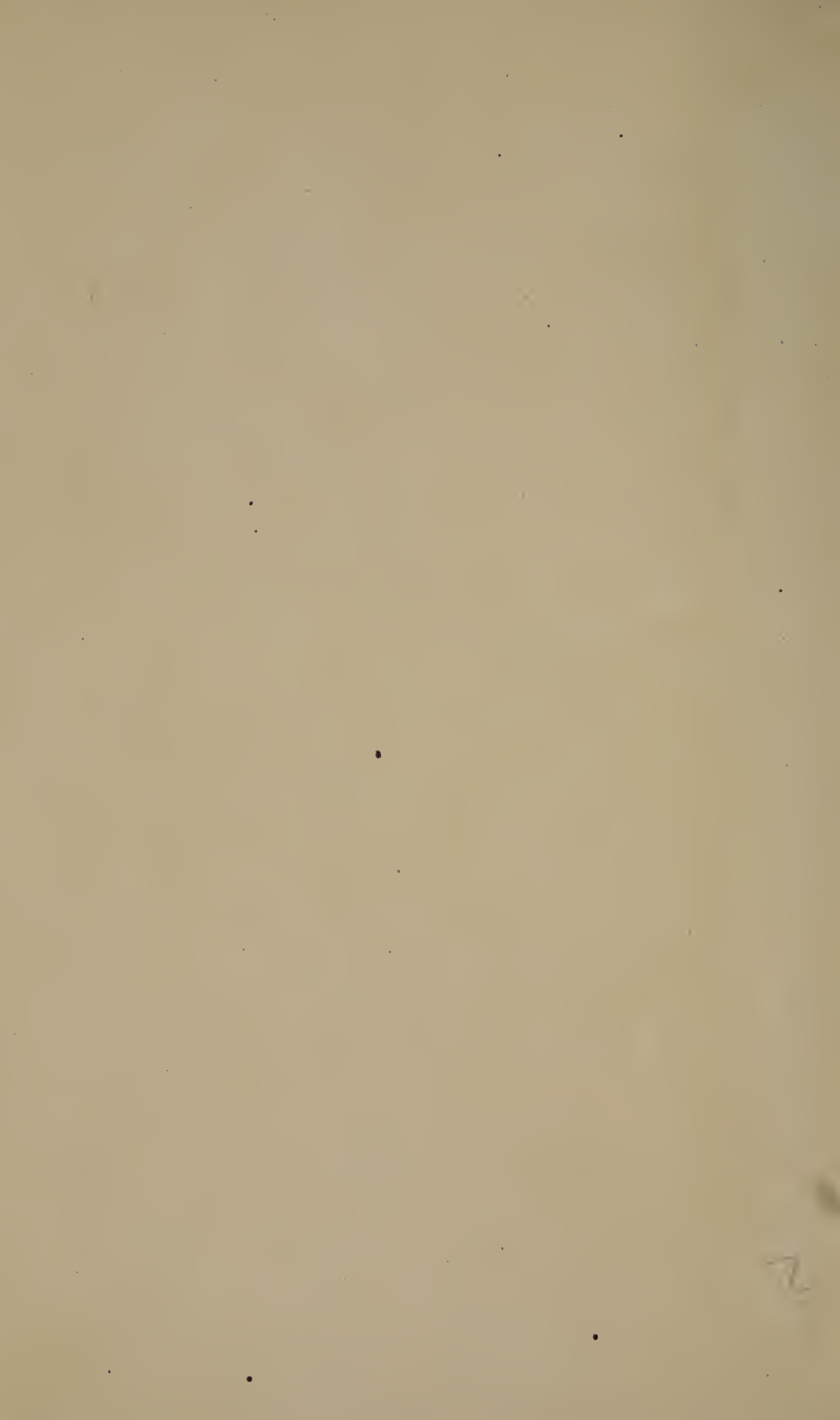
“ I am only a *common* man myself,” said the stranger smiling, and taking the offered chair,—next to the labouring man’s wife,—

“and you, my friend,”—grasping the working-man’s hand,—“are my brother.”

Two Sundays after, Mr. Gambray had left Abbeyslea parish ; and, this stranger—the Reverend Ambrose Liddon — was reading himself in, in the old Parish Church,—as *Rector of Abbeyslea*.

END OF VOL. I.

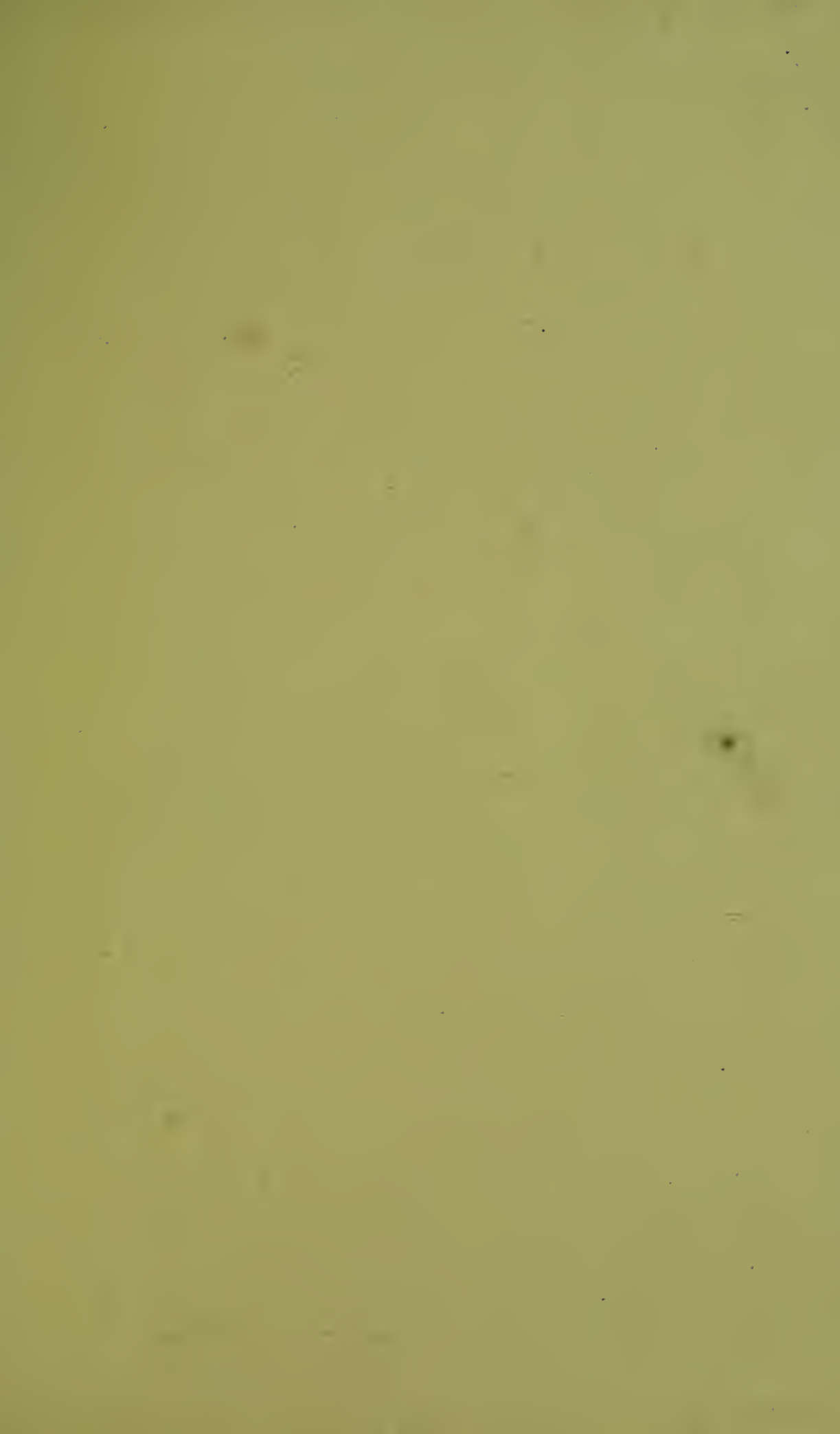




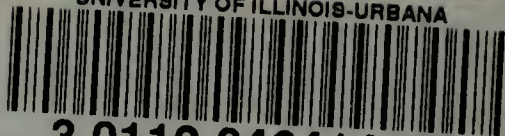








UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 046414360